

THE ARGOSY.

MAY, 1878.

POMEROY ABBEY.

BY MRS. HENRY WOOD, AUTHOR OF "EAST LYNNE."

CHAPTER XIII.

ESCAPED.

WHAT a terrible situation it was! The moonlight streaming in upon the haunted room, with all its ghostly associations, and upon Guy Pomeroy standing against the picture: Guy, who had come to interrupt the interview. His guilty wife—guilty, at any rate, of mean duplicity to him—cowered in her terror. Rupert, turning sharply round from the window at her cry, wondered what the matter could be.

The Lord of Pomeroy strode forward, his white features livid in the moonlight. Thrusting his wife out of reach of harm, spurning her with his foot, for in her dismay and fear she sank to the ground of her own accord, he drew a double-barrelled pistol upon his brother. The ball missed him, entering the dark wainscoting: and yet the Lord of Pomeroy had a sure hand in general. Ere he could draw again, Rupert closed with him, and they grappled for the weapon. Mrs. Pomeroy heard the deadly scuffle, as she sped, gasping and moaning, from the chamber, through the rooms of the west wing, and gained the stairs of the north tower. In her haste and terror she fell down them against the door below: and just then she thought she heard the noise of the second barrel, but was not sure.

Up again in a moment. She seized the key which Rupert had left in the door; but whether she turned it, or whether it was previously unlocked, she never knew. Probably the lord had left it unlocked when he entered: though, how he had contrived to

enter, considering that Rupert had locked the door on the inside and left the key in it, was a mystery.

The door, opening into the cloisters, stood ajar. Mrs. Pomeroy flew out, sank down on one of the green benches of the quadrangle, clasped its arm tightly, and hid her face on it—just as we clasp the nearest support for protection on awaking from a terrific dream. She moaned under her breath; not aloud, lest anyone about should hear; she stilled her sobs of remorse and agony: and then she cast stealthy glances up to the window of the haunted room.

Trembling, moaning, cowering; feeling that to die would be a mercy; even the wainscot, which had received the ball, she could envy, and wish it had been her own bosom; Mrs. Pomeroy sat there till the clock went the quarter-past ten. Her ear was on the stretch to listen for her husband's footsteps, descending: at their first distant echo, she would have crept, like a worm, underneath the bench, in her sense of shame. If he saw her there, would he come out and put her to death?

But the probability was that he would stalk straight onwards through the cloisters. And Rupert?—how would he come?

"Can't I go into the lady's room yet?" she heard one of the servants say, who appeared to meet another in the passage. "Getting on for eleven, and it's not put to rights for the night."

"No," replied the voice of Theresa. "The lady said she should try and sleep her headache off, and I was not to go to her room, on any account, unless she rang. The door's fast."

Mrs. Pomeroy shuddered, and held the bench convulsively.

The minutes rolled by, almost killing her with their slow protraction, and the clock chimed the half-hour. In that one half-hour she seemed to have lived the agony of a whole lifetime. Neither had come down; neither Guy nor Rupert: of that she felt certain, for her ears were strung to a strange fineness then. She gazed up at the window; an unbroken gaze now. What was taking place there? Were those two men, meted in height and strength, perhaps in ferocity, struggling on with each other until one or the other should be overcome, struck to death? *Which* would conquer? In this terrible suspense she continued, until the clock struck eleven. A whole hour, and neither had appeared! Were *both* dead? Her heart and throat were working, her ears singing.

She could not bear it longer. It seemed that her brain was giving way. Slowly, cautiously, a step at a time, she stole through the cloisters to the staircase door, put her head up, and listened. There was not the slightest sound. Up still, a stair at a time, and now another, went she; and again she stopped to listen. Nothing—nothing. And so on, through the west wing to the last room in it, silently and creepingly. She paused at the door of the west tower, of the haunted room: little thought she of supernatural visitants now: the bodily ones were filling every crevice of her imagination.

The door was not closed, only pushed to, and the same silence reigned within—a silence that was every moment becoming more awful. She would have given half her life to hear one of Guy's oaths or Rupert's sarcasms. Dead—were they?—and for her?

She pushed the door open, and then shrank back and drew up against the wall, lest the movement should have caused alarm: but neither sound of alarm nor anything else issued forth to indicate that the place was tenanted; so, pulling back the drapery, she peeped in. She had come out of the lighted quadrangle, and her eyes could see, as yet, nothing in the room but darkness; the moon, at that moment, had gone under a cloud. No: still there was no movement, no sound, and she ventured to enter the room. She was stealing towards the window, a vague intention of standing there—whence she could look below and seem less lonely until she should become more accustomed to the darkness—floating through her scarcely sane brain, when she fell over something. Putting out her hand to save herself from quite falling, it touched—either a hand or a face. It seemed like the latter—and it was cold, with the coldness of death.

Her nerves could bear no more: this was the climax. Uttering shriek upon shriek, and tearing along as if the dead man were coming behind her, down she flew again in all the terror of superstition. The noise penetrated to the abbey. The servants came forth, bearing lights; the guests, who had then gone to the quadrangle with their cigars, ran in the same direction—all to meet Mrs. Pomeroy, her face white, her eyes starting. The servants caught her, and she lay, convulsed, in their arms. Mrs. Wylde came up.

All crowded round Mrs. Pomeroy, one universal sense of consternation prevailing. Emotion and fear had brought on something like a fit, attended with hysterical shrieks. Speak, she could not; but she shudderingly pointed, now to the stairs of the north tower, now to the windows of the haunted room in the west one. What she could mean by indicating the north tower no one was able to understand; for, that it should be open, was suspected by none. But the other movement was more readily understood, and the servants called out simultaneously, "She has seen the ghost!"

"Go, go," she gave utterance to at length, "*there*," pointing to the haunted room. "Some one is lying dead."

That her words should be looked upon as the ravings of a not sane brain was natural; nevertheless, old Jerome crept away to his key-closet, and then to the north tower. Had he discovered that his keys were missing? He came back from the staircase with a face as apprehensive as his lady's.

"Who will go with me?" he said, looking first at the gentlemen and then at the men-servants. "If they are at warfare, one man will be powerless to part them."

All were ready to go, none comprehending what they were to go

for, or what there was to do: and they went in a body towards the stairs, bearing several lights. One of the guests, Lord Sones, drew Jerome apart.

"What do you suspect?" he asked.

"I suspect—I suspect there may be a dispute," he slowly said.

"Between whom?"

"Nay, my lord, but I know nothing. Don't detain me."

Jerome took a light from the hands of one of the servants, walked quietly before them, and led the way up through the west wing. At the door of the haunted room he halted, turning round to face those who were following.

"I must go in first alone," said he, his tone one of assured authority. "I am the oldest retainer in the family, in the confidence of the Lords of Pomeroy, and I demand it."

He passed in, and let fall the hangings, no one attempting to dissent; but in less than a minute he held them up and spoke, his voice sounding like a wail.

"Walk in now. Oh, woe! woe!"

Holding their breaths, the crowd pressed in, one upon another. Woe, woe! as Jerome had said: for there lay the Lord of Pomeroy in the arms of death. It was his cold face that his wife had touched.

So, Rupert had mastered! had obtained possession of the pistol in their mortal struggle, and shot his unfortunate brother!—for the bullet was subsequently found in the head. The lower part of the face was also bruised and battered, as if by blows.

It must be remembered that those now gazing on him possessed no clue whatever to the tragedy, its cause, or action; neither could they give the slightest guess as to the perpetrator: Jerome doubtless suspected, but he kept silence. Horror-stricken, bewildered, sick, they began to look about the room for a solution of the mystery, throwing the light of their torches hither and thither. Who had done it?—how and why had it been done? Nothing was to be seen save the ordinary and dilapidated furniture, and the dust on the floor, disturbed as by a scuffle, and the damaged nun's picture resting so still in its frame.

"What's this?" exclaimed one of the guests, snatching up a dark grey cloak, and exhibiting it to their view. "This was not the lord's. Ah, ha! this will lead to a discovery."

"I know that," interrupted a servant. "It is Father Andrew's capuchin. He wears it sometimes when he comes to the abbey on a winter's night."

"Father Andrew's!" echoed the assemblage; and they began to abuse the speaker.

"I could swear to it," doggedly persisted the man: "I know it by those two rents at the tail of the skirt. The father said he got it caught in a gate one windy evening."

Father Andrew, a priest, and an unoffending man, attack the lord!—for of course the words bore that implication. The thing was not likely; it was inexplicable. Jerome, who had sat down on the edge of the velvet settee, lifted his face of misery, and slightly shook his head in dissent. That the motive had nothing to do with robbery was apparent: the lord's signet ring was on his finger, and his valuable gold watch and chain had not been touched. When his pockets came to be examined afterwards, their contents were found safe: keys, pocket-book, purse, and handkerchief with the great crest and supporters, only used by the Lords of Pomeroy—the younger sons used the more simple one. The clothes were much torn, proving how severe had been the scuffle. But Father Andrew! what could have brought *him* in the fray, even as a spectator—or his capuchin? And where had he got to?—and where was the murderer?

The question as to the priest was soon set at rest, for who should walk into the room but the reverend father himself, his form as roundabout, his red face as merry as ever, presenting quite an opposite appearance to all popular notions of a midnight assassin. The terrified women below had sent for him in haste.

"What's to do?" cried he, on the broad grin. "Somebody seen the ghost?"

They made way for him, and threw the light on the floor. Father Andrew's countenance changed. He stepped back awe-struck.

"Who is it?" whispered he. "How was it done?"

"It's the lord; and he appears to have been attacked and murdered," hastily spoke one of the upper servants. "Does your reverence know this?" added the speaker, picking up the cloak.

"That's mine," said the priest.

"How came it here, father?"

A light, as of horror, seemed to break upon him. "I lent that to—to—a friend," he whispered.

"To whom?"

The priest was silent. He did not seem inclined to say. Lord Sones took a step forward. He was not a Roman Catholic.

"Sir," said he to Father Andrew, "it appears to me, as it no doubt appears to those who stand here with me—my fellow guests at this house, and the valued old retainers of my poor friend, lying there—that it is incumbent upon you to speak and say to whom you lent the cloak. A most foul deed has been done: and that cloak is the only clue we possess at present to its apparent perpetrator. You must state freely to whom you lent it."

"Rupert Pomeroy. He came to me yesterday and borrowed it."

There was a pause of dismay; and poor Father Andrew, who had spoken unwillingly in his allegiance to the Pomeroy, and because there was no escaping it, gave vent to a groan of pain.

The public commotion was without parallel. Nothing like unto it had ever stirred up that remote and quiet county. The Lord of Pomeroy had been murdered (so people put it) by his brother Rupert.

The police took the affair into their own hands, turned the servants, as it were, inside out, and collected details at will. Thus, while the death-flag waved over the abbey gateway, and the poor dead lord lay in state in the chapel, according to the Pomeroy forms and customs, a great deal became known of the few days preceding his death, and of the movements of his false and foolish wife. Her secret visits to the old Keep were discovered; and the *second* note written to her by Rupert, asking her to meet him in the west tower, was found. The first note she had torn into small pieces and scattered them to the winds, as may be remembered; pity for her own good name but she had also torn the second. When the police were searching the abbey, to discover, if possible, some clue that might throw light upon the fatal meeting between the brothers, they found this second note, and its contents were made public. The result was not favourable to Mrs. Pomeroy. The bare imprudence and folly of those meetings with Rupert would have been enough to condemn her: and upon such matters as these the worst construction is generally put. Mrs. Pomeroy's own state was pitiable: she neither denied nor admitted anything, but lay in a semi-passive state, her anguish of mind worse than pen can paint. The medical men thought she would have lost her reason.

Rupert had escaped. How, or by what means, none could tell. That he was still concealed somewhere in Abbeyland, perhaps even in the abbey itself, was conjectured by the police, and the search after him was keen. No person whatever, so far as could be learnt, had seen Rupert since the fatal fray. Gaunt testified, and with truth, that he had not returned to the lodge; and the things pertaining to Rupert remained there unclaimed. Bills, headed "Murder," in large letters, were posted about, offering a reward of £200 for the apprehension of Rupert Pomeroy.

As soon as might be after the tidings reached them, Joan Pomeroy arrived at the abbey with her brother-in-law, Henry Capel. Shocked, distressed, horrified, Joan listened to the details of her brother's death, and of the disgrace brought on the house by the woman he had made his wife. Whether innocent of actual crime—as she might be—or whether guilty of it, Alice Pomeroy had as surely been the originating cause of the calamity, had as directly led to it, as anyone can be or do in this world.

In her bitter grief, her anguish, Joan reproached Alice. Not loudly, not severely, but with stern truth. Alice shivered, and answered nothing. Mrs. Wylde would have taken up her daughter's defence, but she began in a lame, shame-faced sort of manner, and Joan swept out of the room. Mrs. Wylde could not bring back to life that unhappy man who had been hurled to death, and died

unshriven. So long as Joan should live, her heart would ache for him, her most ill-fated brother.

A sad funeral; a solemn ceremony: that which attended to his last resting place Guy, Lord of Pomeroy: made doubly sad and solemn by the terrible circumstances of his death. People came to it from far and near, as they had come to that of the old lord; ecclesiastics high in the Catholic church; nobles, friends, relatives, retainers. Leolin Pomeroy crossed the channel and officiated as chief mourner.

Up to the last hour Guy had lain in state in the chapel in his coffin. Many a tear was dropped over him, many a sob suppressed. Pomeroy would not know a better lord. Guy might have been stern and cold of manner, but he was generous of heart. He would have righted wrongs, but never inflicted them; he would have succoured, but not oppressed.

And so, with all this state and ceremony, he was put in the cold chapel vault by the side of his late father: and the people went home, leaving him there. And the death-flag waving over the abbey gateway was exchanged for the hatchment. And Joan, in her superstitious heart, said that this had been the working-out of the prediction. Or, perhaps but its commencement! Who knew?

Jerome quitted the abbey on his return from the funeral, to take up his abode in the Keep. The calamity had sensibly affected this faithful attendant of the Pomeroy. Since its occurrence he had worn a kind of dazed look, and his manner was timorous, just as if he feared his own shadow. His occupation at the abbey was gone, he told Joan, when soliciting permission from her to quit the service and retire to the Keep, and the tears rolled down his cheeks as he said it. Mrs. Pomeroy he declined to serve, and the new lord, George, was not there. For the renegade, Rupert—who was still being hunted for that he might answer at his country's bar for his crime—could not inherit, and George was the Lord of Pomeroy.

"Jerome," Miss Pomeroy took occasion to ask, dropping her voice to the lowest whisper, "can you think where *he* can be?"

But Jerome, instead of answering, gazed at her beseechingly—as if silently imploring her to drop the subject. Joan fancied that he looked a little bewildered.

"I speak of my most unfortunate brother, Rupert, Jerome. He must have made his escape from the abbey that night in the general confusion. Have you any idea where he is?"

"Alas! no," sighed the old man.

"But, Jerome, I cannot help suspecting that you must have been privy to his visits to the west tower."

"Before the holy saints that hear me"—and Jerome crossed himself—"I was not. I declare to you, Miss Joan, that I knew nothing of his having gone there either night. Such a thought, that he would attempt it, never crossed my mind."

Joan wrung her hands. There were moments when the misery that had fallen on their ill-fated house pressed more heavily upon her than she knew how to bear.

For months Mrs. Pomeroy kept her rooms, nursing her remorse and her anguish. One lively terror was constantly upon her—that Rupert would be taken. As spring advanced, and the weather became genial, a sad figure, veiled and draped in crape, might occasionally be seen wandering in the more sheltered parts of the garden, or seated under its gloomiest trees. She now inhabited only a portion of the front pile of the abbey—that lying between the great entrance gates and the south tower—and her household was a small one. The rest of the numerous servants remained, doing nothing; they were the lord's retainers, and awaited his coming home.

George Pomeroy did not appear to be in a hurry to come. When the news of his succession reached him in India, he wrote back appointing an agent, or steward, to act in his place. This was John Gaunt, the gentleman keeper. George Pomeroy endowed him with absolute power and authority: in the abbey and out of it he was to be the unquestioned master. Gaunt proved to be a most courteous and considerate one. Mrs. Pomeroy he treated with the utmost respect, deferring to her in all matters that properly pertained to her. Only once did her wishes clash with his. She suddenly issued orders, some twelve months after her husband's death, for the throwing open, cleansing, and renovating the west wing, and for the barring up of the west tower. Gaunt refused: he said it could not be done. He waited on Mrs. Pomeroy, and told her that he was unable to sanction the order without the consent of the lord. "Write to him for it," said Mrs. Pomeroy, curtly—and Gaunt wrote. The answer was received from India as speedily as mail could bring it. It forbade the west wing to be meddled with in any way: neither that nor the tower was to be touched: and a peremptory command to Gaunt followed, to keep the wing locked up, and not to permit any person to enter it on any pretence whatever.

"The new lord has got all the Pomeroy superstition upon him," quoth the gossips when they heard this. "He won't have things, up in that wing, altered."

The non-return of George Pomeroy vexed his family, Joan especially. Never was such a thing heard of yet as for the Lord of Pomeroy to live away from his own domains. Joan had her own opinion.

"I know why he will not come," she remarked one day to Henry Capel. "George was always chivalrously considerate to other people's feelings. He stays away out of delicacy to the poor wanderer, Rupert."

Mr. Capel could not understand. And said so.

"In the ordinary course of things Rupert would have come in after Guy," she continued. "As it is, he was passed over for George. George feels that; and he will not, in deference to Rupert's feelings, assume his rights as Lord of Pomeroy."

Henry Capel drew in his lips. "Strange reasoning, Joan. One would almost think *you* wished to show deference to that miserable man."

"No. But you don't know George. The more miserable a person is, the more cautious he would be not to tread upon him. He will stay where he is for a year or two, and then come."

Several years passed on uneventfully. Rupert was not found or heard of; George did not return. There were rumours of war in India, he wrote word, and he did not choose at such a time to quit the army. A report had reached Europe some time before that George had married. It was not confirmed; and his own family utterly rejected it. The Lord of Pomeroy was not one to marry privately, without sending proper credentials home: a wife of his could not put her head under a bushel.

At length, when five years, and somewhat more, had elapsed from the time of his accession, Joan grew downright impatient for his return, and wrote him a severe letter about the duty he owed to Pomeroy and the obligation that lay upon him to come home and enter upon his inheritance.

Alas, George Pomeroy never did come home to enter upon it. Before Joan's letter reached the shores of India, war had broken out there, and George fell on the battle-field. Tidings of the sad event arrived, bringing deep sorrow, for all the world had liked George Pomeroy. Never had it been known for one of the lords to die away from his own domains, and the abbey mourned that fact as freely as they mourned him. Once more the death-flag waved over the entrance-gates; masses for the repose of his soul were said in the chapel.

And the youngest of the four sons, Leolin, succeeded as Lord of Pomeroy.

CHAPTER XIV.

AT THE DUCHESS OF ST. IVES'.

It was the height of the London season. The night sky above was studded with its stars, as the starry beauties of this lower hemisphere were pressing into one of the greatest and most exclusive houses of the day. Great in its reference to that iron god, fashion; not greater in its size than many another.

It was the town-house of the Duchess of St. Ives, a wealthy widow, only two-and-forty yet, and beautiful still. She had ruled the world long on her own account, and now she was ruling it in right of

her son. It was the first season he had spent in London since coming of age, and the world was going mad after him. Mothers courted him openly, daughters covertly : for young ladies in those days had not become *fast*, or learnt to enter upon courtship for themselves unblushingly : a grand thing to be Duchess of St. Ives !

A well-appointed carriage dashed into the rank, and struggled its way to the door amidst the rest. The Countess of Essington descended from it with daughters three. The majestic countess, as important in her own eyes, and daring in her own actions, as the Duchess of St. Ives in hers, had brought them all ; the Ladies Mabel, Geraldine, and Anna Hetley. Mabel and Geraldine were like their mother, commanding, stately girls, with clearly-cut features, beautiful, but cold as though they had been carved from Parian marble. Anna was different ; she had nothing of majesty or of marble about her : a fair, graceful girl, with soft, shy, merry blue eyes that drooped beneath their long lashes when gazed into, a flushed, dimpled, lovely face, and a pretty mouth too much given to laughing, and to displaying unconsciously its set of white pearls.

A moment's respite after the reception, and the countess and her daughters were but so many of the brilliant crowd that thronged the rooms. Lady Anna found herself seated next to a young lady with whom they were on terms of close intimacy.

"Have *you* come to-night, Anna ? Three of you ! What an idea !"

"There was no help for it," laughed Anna. "This is the ball of balls, you know, and Mabel and Geraldine would not give up their privilege of elders ; and mamma did not wish me to remain away, because—because ——"

"There ; go on to the rest. I understand."

"What can be done ?" quoth mamma to us this morning at breakfast : 'Geraldine, I wish you would, for once, give up to Anna.' 'Oh dear no,' returned Geraldine ; 'it's not to be thought of.' 'Then I shall take you all,' said mamma. '*That's* not to be thought of,' put in Mabel ; 'there never was such a thing heard of.' 'I may do what others would not dare,' concluded mamma, in her lofty way."

"And that is how you are here ?"

"I don't know whether she would really have brought me in spite of Mabel ; who is very positive, you know, in her opinions—and mamma gives in to her greatly. Listen yet. The duke called, and began talking to me about to-night, wanting to make me promise—oh, I don't know what all—to give him two dances to everybody else's one, and that sort of nonsense. 'I am infinitely obliged to your grace,' I said, making him a demure curtsy, 'but I am not coming.' You should have witnessed his face. 'Not coming !' cried he, when he could find words. 'Certainly not. I am the youngest, and my sisters have precedence over poor me : the inconvenience, you see, of having three demoiselles in a family.' Off

went the duke to mamma, and said—I did not listen, but the result is, that I am here.”

The young lady-listener sat, playing with her fan. “Anna, there need not be any more heart-burnings after the duke: we may all resign him at once with a good grace, for we shall have to do it. You are in luck.”

“Luck at what?” cried Anna, quickly.

“To have gained him. You might be Duchess of St. Ives to-morrow.”

“Might I? Nothing of the sort. I’ll turn him over to you: or to Mabel.”

“You know you might be: and you know you will. Here he comes, true to his allegiance. And now it is good-bye to you for the rest of the evening, I suppose.”

Lady Anna glanced towards the Duke of St. Ives. He was threading his way to her amidst difficulties, for he was set upon and detained on all sides by the gentlewomen who were angling for him with their subtle lines. “It will take him twenty minutes to get here,” laughed Anna.

“Oh, Anna, what a lovely bouquet!” suddenly exclaimed the young lady, observing the flowers for the first time. “Who supplied it?”

“How can I tell?” returned Anna, with downcast eyes and conscious cheek. “It was left for me just before we came out.”

“He has taste in flowers, at any rate, if these were arranged under his auspices.”

“Who has taste?”

“Who! You can afford this pretty affectation of unconsciousness, now you are sure of him. St. Ives.”

“But I am not sure of him,” again laughed Anna. “And I am not sure—indeed, I don’t think—that he sent the bouquet. Another came, less beautiful: ‘Oh, that charming one is the duke’s,’ cried mamma, pointing to this; ‘use that one, Anna:’ and I obeyed, saying nothing, but I fancied the other was his.”

“The duke would send but the one?”

“Of course not.”

“Who sent the other?”

“Can I tell, I say?” returned Lady Anna. “Is not all the world dying to send bouquets to me?” she added, with pretty sauciness. Anna Hetley was in unusual spirits to-night.

The Duke of St. Ives reached her at length, and took her away with him. He was tall; too tall, and too slender; altogether very much like a maypole, with a fair complexion, mild eyes, and a meek, inoffensive face. At Eton he was called “Milky,” and he had never lost the sobriquet. “St. Ives is a milksop still, he has no devil in him,” sneered sometimes the fast young men, his friends, who had rather too much of it in them.

The quadrille was walked over, a waltz was got through. Other dances with other partners came, in their turn ; and just as Anna was enjoying a moment's respite in a sheltered corner, another gentleman came up to her, who had but then entered. Above the middle height, but not remarkably tall, he was yet a distinguished-looking man, his luxuriant hair of a dark brown shade, his grey eyes clear, and his features very fine.

"Anna," he whispered, in a low, musical voice, whose tones spoke love, if ever love was spoken—"Anna !"

She started and blushed vividly : she had not seen him advancing.

"Oh, Leolin !"

"Did you think I was lost ?"

"I thought you were never coming. Why are you so late ?"

"And I am only here now to tell you I cannot come—if that is not Irish. Stanton—you know Stanton ?"

"Yes : a little."

"Well, poor fellow, he has met with an accident to-night, through the bursting of a gun. I was starting to come here when they sent for me : he is in great pain, in shocking spirits, and cannot bear for me to leave him. I told him he must give me half an hour, and I came here to tell you."

"I am so sorry. How—Here comes St. Ives again," she broke off, in a hurried whisper. "Say I am engaged to you, Leolin."

The Duke of St. Ives received his answer, and the other looked at his watch. "I must stay for this one waltz, Anna : the temptation is not to be resisted."

She put her arm within his, and his eyes happened to fall upon the flowers. "They are nicely arranged, Anna, are they not ?"

"I knew they came from you," she softly breathed. "This bouquet and another were left. Mamma jumped to the conclusion that the more beautiful one must be from the duke, and ordered me to use it. His lies neglected on the table at home."

"Anna, I shall begin to fear that the duke is dangerous," he said, as he held her somewhat closer than he need have done, in the whirling waltz.

She smiled and half shook her head, but her shy and pretty eyes were bent to the ground ; otherwise he might have seen how full they were of love.

"And now I must not linger another moment," he exclaimed, when the dance was over. "Poor Stanton !"

"Leolin, I don't believe you have spoken a single word to anybody in the room !"

"I do not think I have : St. Ives excepted. I looked for his mother when I came in, and could not see her."

"I was very nearly not coming, Leolin. We are three of us, you know—and had Lucy not married she would have made a fourth. The duke called to-day and talked to mamma, and *would have* me come."

"You should contrive to give the duke a hint. Good-night, my dearest."

He left her sitting where she was and quitted the room. Anna's eyes followed him. She saw him step aside to greet the duchess, she saw him turn when at the door to give herself a last look. With his departure, the evening's happiness had gone out for her.

"I never heard of anything like it!" uttered Lady Anna Hetley, as she stood before her mother the next morning, with crimsoned cheeks. "How stupid he must be!"

"Stupid?" echoed the countess.

"Was such a thing ever heard of, mamma? As if he could not have waited till a proper time and season! And what in the world took papa there last night? I don't think he has troubled a ball for years."

"Is anything the matter with Anna?" exclaimed Lady Geraldine, who had entered while her sister was speaking.

"A piece of good fortune is the matter with her," returned the countess. "St. Ives spoke to your papa last night about her."

"Made her an offer? asked for her?" breathlessly returned Geraldine.

"Yes, he did. I knew it was coming to it."

"And what is she grumbling at?"

"We go by the rules of contrary in this land," cried the countess, shrugging her shoulders; "the more happiness is rained upon us, the more we grumble. Grumbling is indigenous to England."

"But think of the stupid way in which he went to work," retorted Anna; "never to say a syllable to me, never to give me a hint of what he was about to do, but to go blundering off-hand to papa! And to speak to him in his own ball-room, at his own house! I wonder papa listened to him."

"What did it signify where he spoke to him?"

"It signifies this—that he ought to have told me first, and not have broken it to papa without my knowledge."

"You must have seen what it was coming to —"

"What *is* the matter?"

The interruption came from Lady Mabel. She and Geraldine had lain late in bed, as in fact had Lady Essington, and so made their first appearance in a desultory manner when the day was advanced.

"Anna is an idiot," explained Geraldine to her sister's question, "that's what is the matter. Yes, Anna, I repeat that you must have known what it was coming to. He has flirted enough with you."

"There's the evil," cried Anna. "Men are so much given to flirt now-a-days, that you cannot tell what is flirting and what is real: and woe be to the feelings of any girl who mistakes the false for the

genuine. If the Duke of St. Ives has flirted with me—though I hate the word, and I have *not* encouraged him—others have flirted with him. Some of you girls have been ready to pull him to pieces in the contest.”

“Mamma, just listen to her—she says she has not encouraged him!” exclaimed Mabel, with a smile.

“I have not encouraged him more than I could help,” said Anna. “When he has talked to me, I have answered him; when he has asked me to dance, I have not said No. I like talking, and I like dancing. Was it my place to assume that he was only paving the way to invite me to be Madame la Duchesse?”

“You have worked on for it, though, in your quiet way,” retorted Mabel, who was going on in this way out of sheer vexation that the prize should have escaped herself.

“Indeed, indeed, I have not, Mabel,” spoke Anna earnestly. “He has been always seeking me, and I could not avoid that; but I have *not* encouraged him.”

Mabel retorted. “Only last night you went to his house, caressing the flowers he left for you.”

A suppressed smile crossed Anna’s face. “Well, it is done, and it cannot be undone,” she rejoined; “but I must repeat, that he has acted as—as—only one gifted with as little brains as the Duke of St. Ives could act.”

“What do you mean is done, and can’t be undone?”

“His speaking to papa. And I say he has no brains, to go and do it.”

Lady Essington lifted her hands. “Take care, young lady, that you don’t show these airs before him; or he may think twice ere he completes the bargain. And here he is—he said he should call early.”

But the footsteps ascending the stairs were not the Duke of St. Ives’. They were those of the gentleman with whom Anna had snatched a waltz the previous night, during the brief period of his stay in the crowded rooms. They were the steps of a chieftain, bold and fearless; of one who carried his head erect, and on whose lofty features might be traced the consciousness of a descent second to none. The servant threw wide the door:

“The Lord of Pomeroy.”

The Lord of Pomeroy was not the Duke of St. Ives; and some little disappointment may have been felt by Lady Essington. But, if so, it was but momentary, for the Lord of Pomeroy was also a favoured visitor. He told them of the painful accident to his friend Stanton: a young man who was attached like himself to one of the embassies abroad, and was just now over here on leave.

Before he had quite finished the recital, the old Dowager Faulcot came in with her two nieces; intimate friends of the Essingtons, who might call early or late. Lady Faulcot began a rare tale of scandal,

more interesting in its way than the gun accident to Stanton. In the midst of it Anna escaped to the conservatory, and was followed by the Lord of Pomeroy.

"Leolin, he has asked for me!" she exclaimed, when they were sheltered in that retreat, and beyond the ears in the drawing-room.

"St. Ives?"

"Oh, yes. He spoke to papa last night in the rooms—actually in his own ball-rooms. If he had but spoken to me, I could have given him an answer quietly, and there would have been an end to him, and nobody the wiser. I am not sure that it is honourable to tell you this, Leolin; but—but—papa accepted him."

Leolin Pomeroy's brow flushed, for he loved her with a passionate and powerful love: but the pride of his race rose within him. The Lord of Pomeroy, secure in his remote and high descent of untold generations, afraid of the new Duke of St. Ives, whose ancestors, seventy years ago, were of the people! Anna glanced at him timidly, her lovely eyes full of tears. He drew her to him, and bent down his face with a tender whisper.

"Which shall it be?—the Duke of St. Ives, or the Lord of Pomeroy?"

"Oh, Leolin, why do you ask me? You know; you know."

"Is your father at home?" he inquired, between his kisses. "Can he be seen?"

"Would you ask him now, Leolin? Now?"

"Now. Before I leave the house. You must be my promised wife this day, love, if you would not be his."

They drew apart hurriedly, for voices broke on their ears, ominously near. Lady Essington and the dowager and the rest came in view, perhaps to see what the two young people might be doing. They saw Anna seated on a large flower-pot turned upside down, training the refractory branches of a rare plant, with a refractory name that nobody yet ever succeeded in spelling; and the Lord of Pomeroy ungallantly standing with his back to her, lost in contemplation of the wonderful American aloe, which blossomed but once a century.

Lady Faulcot's sight was keen, and her imagination crafty. "You should have your eyes about you," cried she confidentially to the countess. "Anna is just at the age that she may get her head turned, and he does not want for attractions, that young Lord of Pomeroy."

"My dear dowager, Anna is all safe. She marries St. Ives."

"Eh! what? Who says so?" ejaculated the dowager.

"He made his proposals for her to the earl yesterday. It is all settled."

"Mercy on the rest of the girls, then!" cried Lady Faulcot. "What will they do?—they are all rampant after St. Ives. Is it true that young Stanton has shot his head off?" continued she, pass-

ing further on between the beautiful green plants, and addressing Leolin Pomeroy.

"Not his head, madam. One of his ears and part of his hand."

"What incautious simpletons you young men are to get toying with guns! I'd rather play with a wild hyena, for my part."

"There was a flaw in it," said Leolin. "Bishop——"

"I daresay, lord. That's sure to be the tale—Bishop, Bishop! he's always in fault; never your own careless awkwardness.—Anna, we are to congratulate you, I hear. Take care, child, that you don't get a stray shot sent into yourself. When this news shall obtain wind, there are some would give you one, if they dared."

"What news?" asked Anna innocently.

"That you have accepted St. Ives. All the girls were running after him you know."

"That she should speak of it in this open manner—before her nieces, and before him!" mentally uttered the confused countess. "She talks of young men being simpletons! what's she, I should like to ask?"

"Is the earl at home?" quietly demanded the Lord of Pomeroy of Lady Essington.

"I believe he is in his study. Do you want him?"

"I will go to his study," said the lord.

The dowager Lady Faulcot took her departure with her train: but not before Anna had whispered a word to her that her congratulations were premature—of which the old lady believed as much as she chose. Not long after that, Anna heard the study bell ring, and the Lord of Pomeroy was shown out. Then came a message to Lady Essington: the earl wanted her in his study. Mabel and Geraldine followed their mother out of the room, but not to the study; and this left Anna alone.

She was alone when the next caller was shown in—the Duke of St. Ives. The young duke, seizing on the favourable opportunity, repeated in person the offer he had made to her father the previous night. Anna, very much distressed now that it had come to a point, refused him, kindly but firmly.

"This cannot be your final decision!" exclaimed the young man, displaying emotion.

"It is indeed."

"But why have you suffered me to hope?"

"Nay," said Lady Anna, "I have not suffered it: at least, not willingly. What have I done to encourage hope? How could I have acted otherwise than I have? You have been pleased to single me out, rather more perhaps than you have other girls, but I shrank from your attentions instead of——"

"It was that shrinking from me that won me," interrupted the simple-hearted duke; "it was indeed."

"I am very sorry: but I can't see that I am to blame. I could

not speak to you and say you must not court me, before you first spoke to me. I could not dare to assume that you were about to propose to me, without being sure of it."

The duke allowed that : but he grew hot and somewhat incoherent in his disappointment.

"Lady Anna, can you not say that you—that you—will let it wait awhile, and think of it?"

"Oh no, I cannot; it must not wait a day. I can never say otherwise than I do now."

The duke nervously pulled his glove about. "I would try to make you so happy : I would not have a will but yours."

Anna was nervous also : it was her first essay at a refusal. She stammered out that he was very kind; very.

"I'm sure I thought you liked me."

"And I do like you, very much indeed," she impulsively answered, in the candour of her heart. "But not—not in that way. I like you very much better than any of the other young men we know. Except—except perhaps one or two," she lamely added, with a blush.

"I am afraid you love some one else, Lady Anna."

Her face presented a picture of confusion.

"I see how it is," he whispered. "I have been indulging a foolish hope—and it had no foundation. I hope you will forgive me."

"We can be friends still," she answered earnestly, glancing almost appealingly at him through her glistening tears, for few natures were truer and tenderer than Anna Hetley's. "Believe that I would not willingly have played with you."

"I do; I do believe you. It has been my fault—my mistake."

"If you had but just spoken one little word to me!—but, as I say, I could not speak to you," she timidly repeated, feeling, in her concern and sympathy, that she had been the unwitting cause of inflicting some cruel wrong upon him. The duke prepared to leave.

"I shall never care for anyone else, Lady Anna."

He nervously put out his hand, then drew it back, then put it out again. Anna frankly put her hand into his—and pressed it kindly : some vague idea running through her mind that it might soften the blow.

The duke sighed. "I think the next best thing to having you—will be to have your sister," he observed, deliberating with himself. "If I cannot be your husband, it will be something to be your brother. I don't love her, it's true; but I shall never love anyone now."

The candid avowal, and the rueful tone it was made in, changed the current of Anna's feelings. She almost laughed.

"Oh, yes; that would be delightful, if you could only fancy one of them. Which of them do you mean, Mabel or Geraldine?"

"Well, I don't know," said the duke; "I have not thought about it. I must talk to my mother. Good-bye."

Shaking her hand again, he quitted the room, and was out of the house quickly. Anna, inexpressibly relieved in more ways than one, hummed a waltz, and danced round and round the room.

Lady Essington had found her husband waiting for her in his study. A little man, wearing a black velvet cap on his head, and a flowery chintz dressing-gown: a merry-hearted little man, who liked to take things pleasantly.

"Did you send Pomeroy to me?" he asked.

"I told him you were here. Why?"

"He wants Anna."

The countess questioned with her eyes and lips. "Wants her for what?"

"To be his wife."

"What a donkey he must be!" uttered the lady, irascibly. "Why, the old Dowager of Barham told him that she was going to marry St. Ives!"

"But is she going to marry St. Ives?"

"Of course she is," retorted the countess.

"She may like somebody else better. The Lord of Pomeroy says she does."

"I wish the Lord of Pomeroy had been buried in the Pomeroy vaults before he had come upsetting things in this way!" was the intemperate rejoinder of Lady Essington. "There's not such a match in all England as St. Ives; if Anna were to refuse him I would never forgive her. Besides, she can't now: that prating old dowager is off to tell it to all London."

The earl laughed: he enjoyed the joke. "You and the dowager must settle it between you," said he. "I suppose, my lady, you told her first. But, if Anna has got the Lord of Pomeroy in her head, she can't marry St. Ives."

My lady scowled. "Would you let her marry Pomeroy, with St. Ives in the way?"

"I'd let her marry Pomeroy with St. Ives in the way, or without him," returned the good-natured earl. "When young people take mutual likings, where's the use of standing out against them? Had there been anything objectionable in Pomeroy, any cause against his wooing her, why did you suffer them to meet? Here has he been in the house continually, like a tame cat. Not that I complain: I like the young fellow."

"I have allowed him to come in like a tame cat, as you elegantly express it, because I was in hopes he would take a fancy to Geraldine," was the answer, sharply spoken. "I am sure it is to Geraldine he has mostly talked."

"When he has talked aloud," put in Lord Essington, with another laugh. "I always thought it was Anna, and so I tell you. They were for ever together when we were abroad."

"My daughters have been too properly reared to allow themselves to become attached where it is not expedient," said she, loftily.

"But nature's nature," cried the earl.

"And training's training," retorted the countess. "What if they did see each other sometimes abroad?—he was nothing but a younger son then, and had no more thought of coming into the Pomeroy estates than I had."

"He says she loves him; and he says he ardently loves her," was the only answer the earl gave to this. "I believe he does."

"Love!" rejoined my lady, scornfully. "Love must give place to expediency. Did he speak of the duke?"

"He did," replied the earl, his face in a glow of merriment. "He called him names: The bran'-new Brummagem duke!"

Lady Essington's eyes flashed fire. "Shameful! How dared he?"

"Dared? Oh, come now! These old, old families, these long-pedigreed aristocrats (we are not very old ourselves, you know, Lucinda), do hold in contempt new people. In point of descent, the Duke of St. Ives is not worthy to buckle on the garter of the Lord of Pomeroy."

Lady Essington's tart rejoinder was stopped. She heard the duke's voice upon the stairs; and, opening the door, saw him passing along the hall. He was departing after his interview with Anna. Lady Essington hastened to accost him; but the duke, ever so far on then, looked back with a cold bow only, and was gone.

"She has been refusing him!" exclaimed the countess, sinking in a chair. "I'd lay all the money I am worth, that she has been refusing him. And I never knew he was here!—and that old Dame of Barham will have gone with her open mouth round the town! If Anna has been so great an idiot, I think I shall beat her!"

She bent her angry and hasty steps to the drawing-room, and caught my young Lady Anna in the midst of her waltz. Arresting her by the arm, she swung her round the other way; not very gently.

"What have you been doing to the Duke of St. Ives?"

"Mamma! how you startled me!"

"What have you been doing to the Duke of St. Ives?"

"Oh, please don't be angry!" implored Anna. "I only told the duke I could not marry him."

"You wicked girl! Not marry him! Not marry St. Ives! Mabel, come here," interrupted the countess, hearing Lady Mabel enter the next room, "look at your sister there: see the figure she cuts! She has been refusing St. Ives."

"You have not?" debated Mabel, slowly, speaking to Anna. "You are not quite a fool, *au fond*."

"Such a fuss!" cried Anna, goaded into rebellion. "Who's St. Ives? The Lord of Pomeroy calls him ——"

"Be still, you shameless child! How dare you mention Pomeroy

to my face?—after sending him to your papa with a tale that you had fallen in love with him, and he with you!”

Anna stood with blushing cheeks and drooping eyelids. They might read in her face that it was no fable, the love existing between her and Leolin.

“Mabel, he called St. Ives a bran'-new Brummagem duke, or some such vulgarism; and—and”—my lady hardly knew whether to subside into hysterics, or to shake Anna—“your father takes his part; says he shall have her.”

“He is the Lord of Pomeroy,” observed Anna, in a low tone. “But for the Duke of St. Ives wanting me, mamma, you would never have thought of objecting to him.”

“Right, child,” exclaimed the earl, who had come in now, and was ready to burst with suppressed laughter. “I say if they had not wanted you to have young Pomeroy, he should not have been allowed to come here.”

“Well, papa,” cried Mabel, sharply, “I never thought you would have upheld Anna in such conduct.”

“What conduct?” asked the earl.

“She has encouraged the duke shamefully; nobody else has had a chance with him; and I do say that to turn round upon him now is not good conduct. Last night that ever was, she went parading his bouquet in his own rooms.”

Lord Essington, for all his good nature, had as keen a sense of what was right and wrong as other people. His face wore a displeased look as he turned to Anna. She bit her lips to hide a smile.

“Two bouquets came for me, papa. The one was a beauty, and mamma ordered me to use it.”

“But you had no right to use it,” screamed the countess, “if you meant to reject the duke to-day.”

“But it was not the duke's,” returned Anna; “the duke's was the one we left at home. It was the Lord of Pomeroy's.”

A pause. They were taking in the sense of the words: of the treason.

“You little deceitful —” began her mother. But the earl burst into a hearty laugh, which drowned the rest of the reproach.

As will probably have been gathered by the reader, Leolin Pomeroy, unlike his brother George, had lost no time in assuming his new honours, as head of his house. Resigning his diplomatic post at once, he hastened to London, made a flying visit to the abbey, and then went back to London again, all within a week. His attraction was the Lady Anna Hetley, whom he had met and seen a great deal of abroad. He had not dared to hope for her when he was one of the many nameless, obscure attachés: but he meant to have her now that he was Lord of Pomeroy.

CHAPTER XV.

LADY ANNA.

"WHAT slur is it that lies on the Pomeroy escutcheon? I am almost sure there is one."

The question was put by Lady Geraldine; and her mother at once began to ransack her memory. She fancied she had heard of something disagreeable that happened in the family a few years ago. The Essingtons had not been intimate with the Pomeroy: the eldest daughter, Lucy, had once, when staying with some people in the same county, been taken to the abbey on a short visit. Lucy was married now, and lived in Ireland. Last year, during a stay the Essingtons had made on the continent, they had seen a good deal of the young attaché. He was plain and poor Leolin Pomeroy then. He was the lord now: but it was most unreasonable of him to come after Anna when the Duke of St. Ives wanted her. Lady Essington was not a woman to give up her way or her will without a fight to keep it. She had set her heart upon marrying Anna to the duke, who could hardly count his riches, and she did not choose to be frustrated by the (comparatively speaking) poor Lord of Pomeroy. This suggestion of Geraldine's was, therefore, as welcome to her as gold; for, if there was a hole in the Pomeroy coat, it was clearly her duty to find it. Should it turn out to be a large one, she might make it a pretext for declining the alliance.

Down, on the spur of the moment, went Lady Essington to Lincoln's Inn, to the offices of that noted firm of solicitors, Hildyard and Prael. Mr. Hildyard, a most respected Roman Catholic gentleman, was the confidential adviser of the Essingtons, also of the Pomeroy: if there was anything amiss he would know it. Lady Essington was at once admitted to him—an elderly, neat, silent man, who always dressed in black with a white shirt-frill, and was altogether of the old school. It was not the first conference by many that Lady Essington had held with him in that private room of his. Her husband had a vast deal of trouble with their only son, the spendthrift Viscount Cardine, and she liked to interfere sometimes herself.

Home she came to-day, rather dissatisfied. Mr. Hildyard had assured her that he knew of nothing against the Pomeroy—with the exception of the fatal quarrel between Guy and Rupert. Leolin stood as high as a young man could stand; high in character, and honour.

"Mamma," spoke Geraldine, as her mother entered, "you might have spared yourself the visit. Old Mrs. Knox has been here, and told us all. The late lord killed his brother."

"The brother killed the late lord," corrected Lady Essington. "It was done in a scuffle."

"Mrs. Knox called it murder."

"A scuffle—that's what old Hildyard called it. But he is as close as wax. It was not the late lord, however, Geraldine. That was George, who has recently died, and who never came home at all."

"It was Guy: the one that Lucy knew. Mrs. Knox says the inquest brought it in wilful murder, and the brother who did it is being looked for still. Anyway, whether killing or murder, it was disreputable."

"Most disreputable," warmly assented Lady Essington. "Where's Anna?"

"Papa called her down to the study," crossly answered Geraldine, who was often in a temper the reverse of amiable, and was especially so to-day. She had had private hopes herself of the new Lord of Pomeroy: and now he had cast upon her the unpardonable slight of passing her over for her younger sister.

The countess hastened to the study to see what treason might be hatching. Once that simple husband of hers, who had as little notion of the social proprieties of life as an owl, and that simple Anna, who had less, got plotting together without herself to keep them in order, there was no guessing at the result.

The result displeased the countess. Her worst fears were realized—Anna had been told she should wed the Lord of Pomeroy.

"Anna, are your affections fixed upon Leolin Pomeroy?" began the earl, in his usual simple, straightforward way, when he had called her down to his study and closed the door.

Anna's cheeks grew crimson. She turned to the window, which had an agreeable view of a small back yard, to hide them.

"Or upon the Duke of St. Ives?"

She glanced up at him now. "Oh, papa, no! I don't care for the duke. I only like him as a friend; I could not be his wife. And—and——"

"And what? Speak freely, my dear. This is a solemn subject."

"I thought also that a union with the duke would not be quite suitable for me. We are not of the same faith."

"True. But so many intermarriages take place now that—at any rate, your mother sees no objection. We will let that question be. I only wish to give you a word of advice, Anna: before deciding irrevocably, make sure that you know your own mind. The young men are both desirable; I like them much. Pomeroy has the advantage in lineage, St. Ives in money: not but that, in my opinion, Pomeroy is quite rich enough. The wife of the Duke of St. Ives, let him marry whom he may, will be mistress and master—he will make a docile, obedient, kind husband. The Lords of Pomeroy, on the contrary, have the reputation of liking to rule their wives with an imperative will."

The tears stood in her eyes as she looked beseechingly up. "Papa,

I could not respect or love a man who would yield his will to mine in great things. I must be able to reverence my husband, to find him one that I can obey : and I am certain that Leolin will ever love me and be indulgent to me."

"Be it so, then," said the earl, as he kissed her forehead. "Long life and happiness to you, Lady of Pomeroy!"

It was at this critical juncture that Lady Essington interrupted them, her bonnet on, her shawl not unfastened, just as she had come in from Mr. Hildyard's. When she found that her husband had weakly given his promise, she turned upon him in anger.

"Why, you must be a born idiot, Lord Essington! Think of the duke's money!"

"Money! Oh, ah, he has a good deal of that. More money than brains." And my young Lady Anna, being so far wanting in reverence as to laugh, her mother grasped her arm angrily.

"I have a great mind to shake you, you undutiful child. Who is he, that Leolin Pomeroy, beside the Duke of St. Ives? The other day he was but a miserable attaché."

"But, mamma, he is Lord of Pomeroy now."

"Lord of fiddlestick! Have you reflected what it is to be a duchess, and to be richer than nearly every other woman in London?"

"I should not know what to do with the riches," said Anna, simply. "Besides, the duke is not of our faith."

"What of that? He would not interfere with your faith, or you with his. I daresay you might have the honour of converting him in the first twelvemonth."

"I should not try," said Anna.

"Not try!"

"No. I am not clever enough for that. And I think good people like to keep to the faith in which they have been reared—if they do their duty in it."

"Oh, indeed!" spoke the countess, sarcastically, while the earl nodded approval at Anna. "How highly ridiculous you are! You could let his faith alone if you chose."

"Oh, but I should not like it at all," pleaded Anna, the tears falling on her flushed cheeks. "I should not like for my husband to worship in one church and I in another."

She was much excited; her fingers were interlaced, one with another, tears were streaming down. Lord Essington fondly laid his hand upon her head to reassure her.

"And indeed, mamma, for these reasons and others, I *cannot* marry the Duke of St. Ives. Papa has been so kind as to say that he does not object to the Lord of Pomeroy: if you object, why I must remain unmarried. I could never have anyone but Leolin."

"There, there; don't fret," said the earl, soothingly. "I've said it, and I'll stick to it. The Lord of Pomeroy is quite rich enough for you and for me, Anna; and your mother would have thought him

so, but for St. Ives. You be off upstairs, my dear, and tell Pomeroy I say so. That's he, now gone up, I fancy : I told him he might call for his answer this afternoon."

"You have done a pretty thing!" snapped my lady, as Anna escaped. "Letting the best match in the world go out of the family!"

"One can't be always wise," smiled the earl, ever good-humoured. "I am not going to have my children made unhappy for all the fine matches in christendom."

"You'd rather see them old maids. I know that."

"I don't know but I'd as soon see them old maids, as not," he avowed. "Marriage is all a lottery. But that's not the present question. I don't myself understand how Anna is to be an old maid if she marries Leolin Pomeroy."

"You always were aggravating, you know, Essington."

"I really don't know it: I did not think I was," he answered, still smiling. "I confess, looking at the matter with my eyes, the Lord of Pomeroy seems to be an exceedingly suitable match, ay, and a good match, for any one of the girls. I say you would have thought so but for getting St. Ives on your brain."

"I have not got St. Ives on my brain."

"No? Well, it looks like it."

"But for me, Essington, the girls might go altogether to the dogs. Look at Lucy. Because she fell in love with that foolish fellow, Captain Blake, and he with her, you must needs go and let them marry! Of course she has been buried alive ever since at that bog-hole of a place of his, in Ireland, living no doubt upon potatoes."

Lord Essington's face lighted up with mirth. "It is a very pretty place," he said. "I would ask nothing better than to live there myself; and Blake's a good fellow, and Lucy's as happy as the day is long. And, his six thousand a year will buy them something better than potatoes, I take it."

"Do you *really* mean to let her have him?"

"Have whom—Blake? Why she has had him these three years."

"There! Do you aggravate me, or don't you? You know I meant Anna."

"Oh, Anna! I'm sure I thought you were speaking of Lucy. Well, yes; there's no help for it—and I expect she has told Pomeroy so by this time. It is not my fault: I did not choose him; you must acknowledge that, Lucinda."

"They chose one another, it seems," snapped the countess.

"Quite so. And you, by letting them be always together, winked at it. Pardon the word."

"But I thought he came for Geraldine," said poor, mistaken Lady Essington, with something very like a sob. "At least, we hoped it. St. Ives was after Anna, and who was to suspect that Pomeroy would interfere with *him*? I should have been the envy of every house in London had we secured St. Ives."

The earl laughed. To his unsophisticated nature, these anglings after desirable settlements, so rife in the great world, were a source of both wonder and amusement.

Meanwhile, Anna, escaping to her own room, effaced the marks of tears from her face and then went to the drawing-room. Leolin, waiting alone, uneasy, full of suspense, turned when the door opened. She closed it, and halted there. He walked towards her: his face grave, his voice low, his hand outstretched.

"How is it to be, Anna?" he began, with some emotion. "Your father would not give me any answer this morning: he said I must come again."

But the tender light in her blue eyes, the soft blushes that came and went upon her cheeks, told him enough. With a faint cry of pleasure, he caught her to him.

"My darling, I see it! You are to be mine?"

"Papa has left it to me, Leolin."

"And then—and then"—he was kissing her between every interval—"my darling will leave it to me. And I say she must be mine without any unnecessary loss of time."

"Oh, but not yet, Leolin."

"Not yet! Why?" he asked, taking a chair near her.

"Oh, I don't know. It is only just settled—only to-day."

"But it is a great many to-days that we have loved each other. Ah, Anna, what should we have done had I remained the poor attaché? What might be in your mind I did not presume to ask then; but I know that I was troubled and tormented beyond measure, fearing that, poor as I was, and with no position, I might not presume to ask for you. Now and again it has crossed my mind to go out to India and beg my good-natured brother George to give me an income. I think he would have done it."

"Was he very good-natured?"

"Very. Few natures are so generously good as was that of George Pomeroy. He was the least selfish man I ever knew. He was not married, you know, had no children to provide for; and, I do believe, had I gone to him and told him about you, that he would have made things easy for us. What of the duke?"

"I saw him after you left. I told him how impossible it was that I should accept him—and, Leolin, I did say that I had longed to give him a hint before, only that of course I could not: young ladies may not speak first. He was very kind when he fully understood how it was, and I said I hoped we should always be good friends."

"To be sure. We will invite him down to Pomeroy. I like St. Ives myself, and ——— What a lovely child!"

A little fairy arrayed in white, with delicate features, large, lustrous eyes of light brown, and silky curls, was peeping into the room. Lady Anna held out her hand.

"Come in, Annaline."

The child advanced modestly and timidly. Leolin drew her towards him.

"What a gentle little thing! what a sweet expression!" he said aside to Anna. "Who is she?"

"Tell your name to this gentleman, my dear," said Anna.

"Annaline Hetley," lisped the child.

"Annaline?" repeated Leolin. "I never heard the name before. It is a pretty one."

"I think so, too; prettier than Anna."

"Ah, no; not prettier than Anna. Anna is the nicest name in the world."

"She is the little daughter of Captain Hetley: his father was papa's first cousin. Frank is a great favourite of papa's," added Anna, changing her language to French, and speaking freely in her very open nature, "and he deserves to be so. But he is very poor, and he was sadly improvident in marrying early."

"As improvident, I suppose, as I should have been called had I married you when I had nothing to marry upon," laughed Leolin.

"That is just poor Frank's case," she said, her eyes lighting up. "I don't think he has much besides his pay. He fell in love with the daughter of a brother officer, and married her."

"She was poor, also, I suppose?"

"Of course. And she was of no family, therefore I am sorry to say that all our family despise her, except papa, and treat her rather cavalierly. But oh, Leolin, she is one of the best, and most refined, and nicest of women! If anyone ever had a treasure in a wife, it is Frank. Papa fears, though, he will have to sell out."

"Have you a doll, little one?" asked Leolin, returning to his English again.

"No," said the child, "I gave it to Franky when he was ill. There was a great big one in a shop, but mamma said it was too dear."

"No doll! What do you do all day?"

"I play with Franky; and when mamma has the headache I help her."

"Help her, you little woman! How do you help her?"

"I sit on the carpet and watch her, and ring the bell when she tells me; and sometimes she lets me nurse the baby on my lap. Mamma says I am her dear little help-mate."

Leolin laughed. "How old are you?"

"I am four, and Franky is five, and Mary is two, and baby is free monfs. She can't talk."

"I think I must buy you a great big doll. What would you do with it?"

"I should let Franky nurse it. Franky's ill."

"But Franky has your old one."

"No; he 'queezed it and the b'an fell out."

"Then I think we must get one for you and one for Franky," concluded Leolin, his eyes fixed on the sweet little up-turned face, that seemed, somehow, older than its years.

The child's eyes sparkled. "P'ease let Franky's be the best," she whispered.

"To be sure. Franky's best, and yours better. What a little self-sacrificing maiden it is," added Leolin, "this pretty Annaline."

Before the day was over, Lady Essington had come round, so far as to be gracious to Leolin. The fact truly was that she would have found no fault with the alliance of the Lord of Pomeroy—nay, have rejoiced proudly in it, had not the duke, with his riches and his grand title, inopportunately stepped in. The Lord of Pomeroy was rich, but the Duke of St. Ives was richer: and the more we have, you know, the more we covet.

"Did Guy, Lord of Pomeroy, leave any children?" enquired Lady Geraldine that evening of her mother when the family sat alone.

"A girl. No heir."

"I should not care to go to a home already occupied," continued she, for she had not got over her resentment. "I hear the widow lives there."

"She is welcome to live there," interposed Anna, her sweet voice a very panacea for all ills of temper. "The abbey is large enough for more than one household."

"When Anna becomes Lady of Pomeroy, the widow will subside into her proper place," spoke Lady Essington.

"It is usual for the widows of the Lords of Pomeroy to have their own apartments in the abbey," observed Anna. "Leolin has told me a great deal about the Pomeroy customs."

"Oh, the Pomeroy's own to all sorts of old customs and traditions, and they think they must obey them: Mrs. Knox was saying so to-day," returned Geraldine. "They were always a peculiar and a superstitious race."

(To be continued.)



THE STRONGER VOW OF THE TWO.

BY BETTINA WIRTH, AUTHOR OF "PRINCESS ELEANOR."

NOT more than ten years ago, while Verona still sighed under foreign dominion, the old palace owned by the younger line of the "Portalupi" wore a dismal aspect. The last Portalupi lived there within those walls; a woman to whom nature had lent all her charms, who called beauty, talents, and a noble heart her own. It was certainly no fit place for her to live in, that old palace with its immense rooms, its tapestries, illustrating the deeds of her ancestors, its old-fashioned furniture, its silent retainers. She inhabited the back part of the house, where a small garden was somewhat more to her taste than the state rooms of the palace, which had been opened but once in her life. In this garden she had spent her childhood and part of her girlhood: an orphan entrusted to the care of servants, and to a nun, who had been placed at her side to act as governess and guide. The poor young heiress of the Portalupi had seen but few bright days in her life. All the gifts endowed upon her gave her no joy; they bore no fruits for her or others. Had she loved the nun with the pale face and grey eyes, who had been ever at her side, life might still have had some happiness, for nothing ever disturbed the tranquil succession of days. But Drusilla had an in-born dislike for the woman whose white nun's cap had overshadowed her cradle. When she began to understand what was said to her, Sister Agnes told her the history of her birth: told her that her mother had died in giving life to the little girl: that her father, passionately fond of his wife, had died of a broken heart not six months later. The poor child spent hours in thinking over the fate of her parents. Her only consolation was an uncle, a brother of her mother's, who sometimes came to see her: but who, an old bachelor himself, and living in a distant town, could not take the charge of her upon himself, although Drusilla often begged him, with tears in her eyes, to carry her away with him.

When Drusilla's fifteenth birthday came, her uncle visited her, and told her that he had chosen a husband for her, whose acquaintance she might however make, before deciding whether she would have him or not. Drusilla made her mind up to do the least she could—that is, to look at her predestined husband. He was a venerable old gentleman, of a family as rich and powerful as the Portalupis, but enough to make any other young girl utter a hasty—NO! But Drusilla had no means of comparing him with anyone else. She therefore thought she would try it. Anything was better than living in the old house with nobody to speak to but Sister Agnes.

It was thus that Drusilla entered the sacred state of matrimony, and it did not turn out to be what she had thought it. Sister Agnes did not leave her as she had hoped, but came with her into her new abode. She therefore had the choice of either her husband's or her nurse's society. The former took very little notice of her. Why he had married her she failed to see; it must have been for some mysterious reason, which he jealously concealed from her. She had been wife to him only in name. He very soon fell ill, and then Drusilla's truly feminine nature awoke. She nursed him with a daughter's tenderness. He died blessing her, as he would have blessed a daughter—but her heart did not break when she changed her beautiful dresses for the trailing black garments befitting a widow. A strange little widow she was, with her childish face, and the innocent eyes, which still looked inquiringly into the world, as though not one of life's mysteries had been revealed to her.

She very soon left her husband's palace, and returned to the garden where she had spent her childhood. At first the few whom she had come to know during her marriage visited her often; but Sister Agnes knew how to keep them aloof, and about a year after the death of her husband Drusilla was again alone.

One day her uncle came on a visit. And when he saw her, a lonely widow, without the sorrow which makes solitude desirable, with so much of a child still in her, he pitied her. He stayed with her a long time, and somewhat changed the monotonous course of her life. The widow's garments were laid aside, and society was sought and received. But very soon Drusilla's uncle discovered that his niece had after all been very much neglected. Her education was not what a Portalupi's ought to have been, although her manners would, in their graceful simplicity, have become a princess. Thus scarcely a day passed without some blunder being committed, which was agony to the uncle, who began to be very proud of his beautiful niece, and which cost Drusilla herself many a tear. A teacher was engaged, and as Drusilla objected to an old professor—she had had enough of old men—a young priest from the neighbouring convent of Santa Philomena was chosen.

For some time the uncle and Sister Agnes were present at the lessons, at the end of which the young Abbé retired with a bow. But very soon Drusilla's uncle said it would be but polite to ask him to accompany them in their drives and walks, and the young fair scholar with the small dimpled hands quite agreed with him. At last the uncle's presence was required in Florence. He departed, and earnestly begged Drusilla to be attentive to her lessons, as he intended taking her with him the very next time that he came to Verona, when he would show her the world, which she must make herself fit to shine in. The next day when Abbate Ruggiero had given his lesson, he bowed politely, and moved towards the door, as though it had not even been necessary to explain why he did not intend sharing her drive or

walk. She rose with an offended air, and walked to the broad window without saluting him, when the idea struck her that he could not have meant offence; delicacy had whispered to him to act as he did.

"Abbate," she called in her sweetest tone, "come into the garden with me—I have to show you a splendid yellow rose that opened this morning," and without heeding the expressive look of Sister Agnes, she took his arm, and, walking out upon the marble terrace, descended the steps to the garden, where she led him to a sheltered laurel walk. In her own outright child manner, she at once came to the subject uppermost with her.

"Abbate! Why will you no longer walk or drive with me? Is it because my uncle has left me alone, and we are both young?"

He could not speak the words of excuse he had prepared for the occasion—so much frankness he could not but meet candidly.

"Is it not natural, Madonna?" he asked in return. "I did not think that my society could be welcome to you. I suppose you do not care to go out with Sister Agnes alone?"

"I do not mean to walk or drive with Sister Agnes at all. I have ordered the pony basket, and I intend driving you to my little villa on the border of the Adige, which is being prepared to receive me. I intend spending some summer months there. I hear the horses' hoofs on the gravel—Will you come?"

How could he do otherwise? Before Sister Agnes had reached a window, they both flew off at the quickest pace the ponies could muster, with nothing but a diminutive groom behind them.

Ruggiero, with his twenty-three years, and his heart full of blighted hopes and ideals, thought he had never seen so beautiful a creature as this girl-widow at his side. For the first time in all his life he blessed his dress, which alone made it possible that he could enjoy her company as he did now. The cloud which always overshadowed his young forehead dispersed. He asked Drusilla for the reins, and the way in which he encouraged the ponies to still greater speed had bright enjoyment in it. He showed the girl at his side beauties in nature she had not seen before—combinations of light and shade that had escaped her—he smiled, and nodded, and at last he laughed outright. Drusilla had never heard him laugh before, and thought him a hundred times handsomer, and more pleasant and congenial, than anyone she had ever seen. At last they reached the villa on the Adige.

They were welcomed by an old servant, who, for a life's service faithfully given, had received as a reward the post of honour of taking care of Drusilla's gem of a country-house on the river. Drusilla cut short his bows and expressions of joy at her arrival by telling him to have a repast ready in two hours' time. She answered his blank look by telling him to remove the cushions from the seat of the pony-chaise. Everything necessary that could not be had at the

villa, at this time of the year, was stored up there. Drusilla threw a triumphant look at the Abbate, who wondered at her foresight.

"I intend spending a delightful day in the country," she said, taking the Abbate's arm again. "Far from the dismal city and the more dismal palace, and the most dismal of all sisters—Agnes!"

The two roamed about the garden, where everything was blossoming as though eager to get ready by the time the young mistress arrived. She showed him her favourite view; the arbour in which she had played when a child; the bench on which the young girl had sat reading her first novel—"Paul and Virginia."

As they stood on the terrace overhanging the river, "Shall we not spend a happy time here!" she exclaimed, with a sigh.

His voice was sad as he answered: "We? Do you think it possible that I should ever come out here to see you?"

She turned upon him quickly, a bright light in her eye.

"Of course, you will be here every day—you will stay here altogether. What would become of my lessons and my learning if I spent a summer without looking at a book? Why——"

She was going to add that, in planning her summer residence, she had all the while thought of him, and him alone as her companion; but with all her childishness she had womanly dignity enough to keep back the words. A blush ended the sentence for her.

Ruggiero objected. He found a hundred arguments to show that what it was his innermost heart's wish to do, was impossible. She refuted them all, and wound up by a saucy, independent speech that made her ten times more lovely in his eyes than before.

"I tell you, Sister Agnes has nothing at all to say. No one has a right to use their influence upon me, except those to whom I choose to grant that right. And that is only my uncle and, perhaps—well, yes—you. Your convent will not refuse me the favour I ask of it."

She drew him along, with her youthful impetuosity, which had awakened to full life to-day, over gravel-walks and terraces, out into the open air and the sunshine, and there, seated on a rustic bench under a far-spreading magnolia, he spoke words she had never yet heard. He told her of God as he knew and loved and feared the Almighty Presence; spoke an enthusiast's words with an enthusiast's expression, that brought persuasion with it. He gave her few but clear notions of what he believed to be the truth. The girl was sorry to take leave of a great deal that had constituted religion with her; but she had been taught so much that was beautiful from the mouth of the young priest, she could not but believe him. He appeared to her great and good and far above the class of persons she had intimately known from childhood. She replied neither by word nor look, but held her eyes steadfastly bent to the ground, even when he had ceased speaking. At last she drew a long breath, and asked:

"Do you think God would hear our prayer if we spoke it here,

under the magnolia-tree on profane ground, without the emblems of religion around us?"

"Certainly, Madonna. There is no profane ground on all the earth. God has created it all, and His Hand has sanctified it: better than men can by speaking a blessing over solitary spots, whereon they build their churches."

Drusilla remained silent for a long time, and even while walking with the Abbate through garden and house she spoke but little. Yet she had a vague feeling of enjoyment about her, and when she sat down to her board, richly dressed and ornamented, and no one beside her but the young Abbate, she smiled once more. After dinner they sat on the terrace by the river, comfortably sipping their coffee, and without a servant in attendance. Drusilla nestled back in her arm-chair, and in her sweetest tone said:

"Abbate, will you do me a very great favour? Will you tell me why you took holy orders? Why you are a priest, and not a rich young man driving your horses about town, and dancing with young ladies at the fashionable balls?"

"You have answered yourself, Madonna. It is because I am not a rich man that I am a priest. My family is one of old renown, but if we wish to keep the sound of our name intact, we must leave the eldest son in possession of all we have—we others do what we can to live. My brothers are in the army, the navy—I do not know why my father chose me to go into holy orders. I obeyed him when I did not know what obedience brought with it—and I think it the man's duty to redeem the boy's promise. I have always been well treated in my convent; and although my superiors know that I have an opinion of my own in religious questions, yet they allow me to pursue my road unmolested. I am at peace and wish for nothing. That is a point gained at my age, I think, when passions soar high and endeavour to draw us to ruin and decay."

Drusilla had not understood all that he said; yet she felt that it was not all truth. He must have fought and battled with himself before he gained supremacy over body and mind. After a pause she said it was high time to have the carriage ordered, and a few minutes later they were driving home in silence. In the immediate neighbourhood of the town she was herself again, and kindly asked Ruggiero to demand permission of his superior that very day, by which he would be free to accompany her to her villa on the Adige. He promised with a bright look, but expressed fears of being refused.

"And must you obey?" she asked.

"Every word of my superiors!" Ruggiero answered.

"And will you be glad to obey?"

"How can you ask such a question, Madonna. The time spent at your villa would be the happiest of my life, and worth thrice the rest of my days."

"Then you are not happy in your present condition—and have told me an untruth—you, a priest!"

She spoke those words as they halted before her palace door, where a number of servants stood ready to receive her. With a ceremonious bow she dismissed the Abbate, who returned to his convent with a slow step and a musing mind.

Abbate Ruggiero had scarcely returned to his convent when he was summoned before the superior. With a kind look and a soft voice unusual with him the superior began:

"Young brother! you have been busy all day in working for the honour and the splendour of the convent. In its name I thank you for the services you have rendered it."

"I have done nothing whatever whereby I deserve the gratitude of my convent," answered Ruggiero proudly, while a surprised look came into his eyes.

The superior's first words seemed to have been a snare wherewith to entrap the young man. In a severe tone he now continued:

"I thought you clever and pious enough not to need instructions when you entered the palace of the Portalupi. Cannot you see that the young countess is well disposed to renounce the world, which has been faithless to her, and take the veil in one of our nunneries? It was your task to encourage her intention."

"She has no intention of the kind that I know of," Ruggiero answered firmly. "She seems to me all life and joy, and I do not think that she has ever given a thought to entering a cloister. I cannot blame her. The convent's life is for the old and the disappointed."

The superior's brow darkened. "You speak strangely," he said, in a menacing tone. "You speak as ill befits a brother in St. Benedict's holy order. Are *you* old—are *you* disappointed? Donna Drusilla *must* enter a convent, and you, Ruggiero, are the man who must lead her on the right path—you must gain influence over her, and instil into her mind the desire to find a home with us."

"Seek another for this task," was Ruggiero's answer. "I cannot lend a hand to so —"

The superior interrupted him. "Do not speak words for which I must punish you. I know that Donna Drusilla intends inviting you to her villa on the Adige for the whole summer. That is time enough for her conversion, which has been well prepared by Sister Agnes. You have your choice. Either you go as confessor to Donna Drusilla and do as I bid you—or else you leave Verona to-morrow for the mountains of Calabria, where there is plenty of work to do for our order. Fra Angelo goes to the villa on the Adige in your stead."

The words struck like a blow to Ruggiero's heart. Fra Angelo was a fanatic, who sought forgiveness for the sins of his youth by ill-treating his own body, and who was anything but indulgent to the

faults of others. Ruggiero pictured to himself the life Drusilla would lead between Sister Agnes and Fra Angelo. He never once thought of what he should have to endure in the mountains of Calabria; he only thought of her, and the probable result of Fra Angelo's mission. As he opened his mouth to answer, the superior, who had marked the change in his countenance, forestalled what he might have to say:

"Your answer to-morrow morning. We grant you time for consideration."

No sleep came to Ruggiero all that night. He fought the hardest struggle of his life. In the morning, as the bell rang for matins, his eyes were heavy, his body was worn out, but his mind had come to a firm resolve. He had made his mind up not to succeed in Donna Drusilla's conversion. Anything he might do would be well done if it kept Fra Angelo aloof from her.

Drusilla, who did not know how he had fought against himself before he succumbed, expressed her innocent delight at the announcement of his acquiescence in her desire. She stood alone with him in the deep recess of the parlour window, when he told her in broken words that the superior had granted him permission to take leave of the convent for the summer. Not even Sister Agnes was nigh. Before he had the slightest notion of what she was going to do, she had caught his white hand in hers, and deposited a slight kiss upon it. It had been the first, and remained the last. And, indeed, it was no unusual thing in pious Italy for a woman, ever so highly born, to kiss a priest's hand—had the servants seen it they would have supposed nothing wrong in the action. But it was different with these two. Why else would Drusilla have blushed painfully, while she dropped his hand in haste? Why would Ruggiero have lost all countenance, and gasped out words without sense, while his face turned from crimson to ashy paleness?

In less than a week after Ruggiero's conversation with the superior they settled down at the villa on the Adige.

Nothing interrupted the sweet quiet country life for a couple of weeks. Ruggiero had planned a list of lessons which must be rigidly kept up. The rest of the time was devoted to healthy exercise: driving, riding, walking, and rowing on the river. Sister Agnes was strangely indulgent to all Drusilla's whims and caprices. She left her almost entirely to the care of the young Abbate: never accompanied them in their drives or walks: rarely entrusted herself to the boat they both loved to row. Had she dreamed how careless Ruggiero was in doing the task set him, she would have acted very differently. The young man was indeed intent upon elevating Drusilla's mind to what he himself revered, but not in the way Sister Agnes supposed. Drusilla innocently gave herself up to the pleasure of his society. She loved to hear him speak. From a pleasant companion and a learned teacher, he became an absolute necessity to her.

It was thus things stood when Drusilla's uncle arrived. He brought with him trunks and boxes that indicated a long stay, and surprised Drusilla with the news that a distant cousin of hers, who usually lived at Naples, and never had had a chance of seeing her, had begged to be introduced, and that he would arrive at the villa next day.

Drusilla pouted. "I intended having you all to myself for a while, and leading the quietest life down here; and now we must be all gaiety and amiability if this young man comes."

"You shall judge for yourself, and if you dislike Leo you may send him home again directly."

But Leo was not sent home. He was a lively, handsome young officer, and after having been quiet for a few hours after his arrival, he turned the house upside down, and every nook rang with his laughter and Drusilla's echo of it. Life changed in the villa on the Adige. Gay parties followed the homely quiet; country dances on the lawn took place almost daily; regattas on the river were arranged. Sister Agnes's face grew grim again, but Drusilla's eyes sparkled, and the dimples in her young cheeks scarcely ever vanished.

Ruggiero spent half his nights awake in his room, standing at the open window, his eyes fixed on the passing silvery wave of the Adige, his thoughts, he dared not acknowledge even to himself, where? He knew nothing to the disadvantage of Drusilla's cousin Leo, and yet he hated him, without being able to despise him. The young priest had sat for hours in the dark church, trying to understand his own feelings, and had reluctantly come to the conclusion, which spread terror over every atom of his person, that he dearly loved Drusilla; that naught but jealousy was the cause of his dislike to Leo. Many a severe battle with himself followed. Ruggiero tried to look upon Leo in the true light; he tried hard to like him; he tried to think him a fit husband for the charming girl-widow, whose heart he knew was purer than the white rosebud on the morn when it first opens to light and sunshine.

One summer night—Leo had been Drusilla's partner all day; a hundred smiles had beamed upon him—the brave young priest went into the garden to give vent to the pain he had disguised so many hours behind a smile. As he stood on the terrace sheltered by a far-spreading tree on the border of the garden, he heard soft voices below, spoken by persons who stood or sat on the marble landing-steps where the waves played musical tunes with a light boat fastened to a column of the landing-place.

"I am so glad you have come, Julia! so thankful!" a man's voice whispered. "You cannot have been blind to my admiration; my eyes must have told you a thousand times what I now say in words—that I love you passionately."

"Are you not here to woo and wed my mistress?"

"Certainly! but *we* never love the woman we marry!"

"And never marry the woman you love," Julia retorted wisely, although her wisdom seemed of little use to her, for she followed the man, whom Ruggiero had recognised to be Leo, into the boat, and softly echoed the song with which he accompanied the beat of the oar.

Ruggiero stood motionless on the terrace long after they had disappeared in the dusk of the night. He knew nothing of the world, whose faintest echo only reached the walls of his convent-cell. Such wanton treachery was a thing he could not at first conceive.

For a moment he had the thought of protecting Drusilla's maid from the danger impending, but she seemed herself so fully acquainted with it, and so openly and joyfully ran into it, that his interference would have been very unwelcome. His thoughts reverted to Drusilla. They might all play her false, *he* would not. He would seek her the very next morning, tell her all, and thus free her from present deceit and future misery. But little by little the conviction took hold of him that it was a bad part he intended playing—that it was most likely that something of his foolish, sinful passion would appear in his words. Ruggiero was sadly perplexed; his heart beat violently, his head throbbed; a deadly fever pervaded his body. Many hours elapsed before he came to a decisive conclusion, which was not one to still the pangs of his heart.

The next morning was a sad one for the inmates of the villa on the Adige. Julia, Drusilla's maid, came into the breakfast-room, and said that she had not been able to awaken her mistress. The young countess lay on her bed, apparently in sound sleep, but her breath came and went irregularly, her cheeks were hot and red, her pulse was feverish, whilst nothing could induce her to open her eyes. The uncle hastened upstairs, and finding the maid's tale true, he returned to Leo and Ruggiero, and said that a doctor must be sought immediately. Both young men offered to go, but Drusilla's uncle chose Leo for a messenger, perhaps because he thought him the best horseman, perhaps because he required the quiet Abbate's help in the sick-room.

Poor Drusilla lay helpless and senseless for weeks. A typhoid fever did its best to destroy that beautiful young form, whose strong youth battled hard with death. Kind nurses and nuns from a neighbouring convent lent their friendly aid—the doctor took up his abode at the villa, the uncle spent half his time at Drusilla's bedside. But a dark figure was constantly there, watching the suffering girl, watching the doctor, watching the nurses—Ruggiero's dark eyes never abandoned the spot where death was struggling with all he loved. He slept but a few hours during day-time, when he knew that the uncle would not stir from the sick room; no power on earth could have kept him from doing night-watch. The uncle valued his sacrifice, and began to think him the noblest young man he had ever met with. He loved the priest for his sympathy.

Leo asked for news of the progress of Drusilla's illness three times every day at the door of her room, but did not seem much inclined to share Ruggiero's care of his cousin, even if the priest had granted it. Julia—who, as a noisy magpie, had been excluded from her mistress's room—flirted to her heart's content, and tried to enliven Leo's solitary hours.

One night Ruggiero sat by a table, over which hung an alabaster lamp, whose soft light could not pass through Drusilla's heavy bed-curtains, with a book open before him. He did not read, however. He was never tired of watching the sweet girl's breath, which still came and went heavily. She was turned towards him, whilst on her other side sat Sister Agnes, quietly dropping the beads of her rosary. No other tone disturbed the death-like stillness of the room. Drusilla started in her sleep—Ruggiero was by her side in a moment. She drowsily opened her eyes, and looked about her wonderingly. Ruggiero recognised the look of consciousness, and gave the nun a sign to wake the doctor. She glided noiselessly out of the room.

"Then it is no dream!" Drusilla whispered, and a faint smile came like sunshine over her pale face.

The young priest fell upon his knees by her bedside. She slowly laid her hand upon his head, and said:

"Oh, my beloved, we have been very happy!"

Ruggiero felt that she mistook him for another. The thought thrilled through him, and yet her words made him happier than he could have expressed. The caress, the look that he stole from another were to be the light-tower of his life—the strong place to which he could cling in despair. His large, happy, beaming eyes opened wider, and shone gloriously up to her. She bent downwards, and gave him a long, soft kiss. When, scarcely a moment later, the doctor entered the room, he found the young priest prostrate on the floor, Drusilla in a fainting fit, back on her cushions.

Youth and strength got the better of illness and death—Drusilla was convalescent. The balmy summer air poured into the room through the open balcony; snowy soft cushions covered the couch on which the pale young girl lay, who had had so narrow an escape. Her heart and soul beamed in her eyes. She was so glad to think that the beautiful world should not have been taken from her. Her thin white hand rested on her uncle's arm, as he looked at her, happier than even she was, to see her recover. It was her first day out of bed; she had asked him many questions concerning her household—her interest in every detail had returned with health.

"Where is the Abbate?" she blushing asked.

"I do not know. Very likely shut up in his room with his books. He has not been in your room since you have returned to consciousness, and I may say health, although you are still so very weak, my poor one."

"And before that?" asked Drusilla, with an eager look.

"Before that he was all devotion to you, my child. Religion is, indeed, something sublime, if it can turn a man into the tenderest of nurses."

"I felt that he was near!" Drusilla said, more to herself than to her uncle. The latter thought to amuse her by telling her how disconsolate Leo had been while she was ill.

"Poor fellow! He did not know what to do with himself. You are his very life, for he yawned and flung himself about like a man who thinks life a burden."

"He did not divide the watch in my room with the Abbate, then?"

"No, child. That would scarcely have been proper, when Leo is your suitor and almost your bridegroom."

"Who told you so, uncle?"

"Leo himself, you little hypocrite! Why not trust your uncle, who brought Leo here for that very purpose? I shall be so happy to join your hands!"

"Uncle," Drusilla began, with an earnest accent, "Leo told you an untruth. We have never said a word upon the subject. He may love me, but he has never told me so."

Drusilla sat still without remarking that her uncle had left the room on tiptoe. When he returned he only opened the door to push Leo into the room: then he shut himself out again.

Leo flew to his cousin's couch, and threw himself on his knees by her side.

"My uncle has told me that I might come to you and hear the words that make me happy for the rest of my life! Drusilla, you love me?"

Notwithstanding her weakness, Drusilla's cheeks became red. She opened her mouth for an indignant speech, but closed it again, and, after awhile, said:

"I am very sorry, Leo. I do *not* love you—nor ever shall."

Half an hour later Ruggiero's step moved falteringly on Drusilla's carpet. She had sent her uncle for him—he was to read to her. With a smile and a blush she received him, and answered his broken inquiry for her health by a shake of the hands and a bright look.

Not only that day did Ruggiero sit by her side in the balmy summer air that rose from the garden, heavily laden with the perfume of flowers and ripening fruit—but every day for many weeks coming. Sometimes the uncle occupied the arm-chair by Drusilla's side, and then gay talk sounded in the room, and the books remained closed. But very often Ruggiero was alone with the sweet patient, who looked more charming than ever in all the quilted white satin that surrounded her. Those were hard times for the young priest. Drusilla asked the most embarrassing questions. She spoke words that seemed irreverent to him, and yet had the sound of angels' voices.

One day he read in Dante's *Inferno* the glorious chapter on the eternity of love, which, stronger than every anguish they must endure, makes the two lovers Francesca and Paolo cling to each other even in the night of despair. Drusilla made Ruggiero a sign to pause for awhile. After long consideration, she said :

"Do you think that those two would have defied punishment had they known what it was to be like?"

Ruggiero blushed crimson. He falteringly answered :

"I do not know. But I daresay that the knowledge of what awaited them would not have changed them."

"What makes you think so, Abbate?"

Ruggiero replied with more faith in his eye than Drusilla had ever read there when he spoke of religious things :

"Because love is stronger than fear, Madonna."

"Because love is stronger than fear," the girl mused. "We will read no more to-day, Abbate, if you please. Tell me how you know that love is stronger than fear."

Ruggiero's heart was eager to speak out. Had not he disobeyed his superior and the holy oath of his order because he loved her? But leaving *himself* aside, he told her a number of examples in history and in tradition where love had been victorious over fear, and other passions besides. She listened in rapt silence, but her face told that she was putting an especial meaning into every one of Ruggiero's words, that she was applying every example to a particular case.

When he ceased speaking she remained silent also. Ruggiero was distrustful of himself. With his look constantly fixed on Dante's book, he sat motionless, knowing that if he looked upon his darling, he should be no longer brave. She bent towards him, and with a brilliant look in her still feverish eye, she asked :

"Do you think love can sunder *all* chains?"

Whence came the courage with which the young priest answered :

"*All*, Madonna—save the Church's. The Church leaves its sons no choice but to die or to yield. Few have refused to do the latter by submitting to the former."

The young girl with the childish smile around her rosy lips looked as serious as any of the ancestral dames in the hall below. Time is not exactly the precise thing that our notions call it—with sixty minutes to an hour, and sixty seconds to a minute. It was as if years passed away over that fair bent head. Drusilla had not lived or thought as much in months before as she now did in little more than five minutes. When she looked up, a sad smile trembled on her lips. She took Ruggiero's hand, and said seriously, as though she were giving words to an old resolve :

"I have dreamed a long dream during my illness. My eyes were closed, so that I could not comprehend its right meaning. They are wide open now. I know what there is for me to do. I will

follow Sister Agnes's advice, and take the veil ; for the world brings naught but disappointments with it !”

She threw herself back on her cushions, and covered her face with her hands.

All Ruggiero's blood boiled up. He rose, and letting his fist fall heavily upon the table, he said, in a voice subdued by passion :

“Madonna, you shall not—Drusilla, you must not become a nun ! You little know the pangs that await you—the heavy monotony of life ; the solitude, nay, sometimes hunger and thirst. Drusilla, I cannot tell you all I have suffered ! Blind faith, which alone can console for all, was not my lot. I began to doubt, and with doubt came misery, despair. I have spent years, Madonna, that I defy torments to equal ! And you think that I will let *you* meet a similar fate—you, you, whom I——”

Drusilla looked up with eager eyes—with a look that drew the words from Ruggiero's lips whether he would speak them or not. With his eyes riveted on hers, he murmured :

“Whom I love more than heaven !”

Forgetful of illness and weakness, Drusilla jumped up, and was at his side in a moment.

“I have made you say it,” she whispered. “You cannot retract. If you love me, Ruggiero, you will throw your chains from you, and be mine !”

What were all the temptations of the saints to the one that tried Ruggiero at that moment ! He held the sweet girl, who was his all, in his strong arms. He could fly with her, wherever he liked : she was ready to give up home and religion for him. He could be happy, happier than he had thought it possible for man to be. The struggle was long and painful—but Ruggiero triumphed. He carried her to her couch, and laying her upon it, he kneeled by her side and told her that—he could not !

“I cannot break my vow—I cannot be untrue to my promise. I should not be worthy of you, Drusilla, if I did.”

Their interview was not at an end. Drusilla declared her intention of taking the veil, and nothing Ruggiero could say altered her mind. When she ceased saying so, she asked him if he preferred to see her married to her cousin. Ruggiero saw that she was in earnest. There was no other choice, for the will of the girl had suddenly awoke, and grew a giant on the important occasion. Ruggiero preferred to see her a nun to the fate awaiting her at Leo's side. He protested no longer.

The days that followed brought with them despair for both young lives. Ruggiero spent his nights in the chapel, and could not speak a word of prayer. He scarcely knew which was strongest in him—the joy at knowing that she loved him, or the pain of losing her, his own Drusilla.

With a pale face he entered Drusilla's room one morning and spoke

the farewell words. He could not impart his strength or his power of control to her—she fainted in his arms. But now that his resolve was taken, nothing could shake it. He laid her on her pillows, called her maidens, and only waiting to hear that she had returned to consciousness, he departed with a brisk step. He could not help feeling the difference between now and when he had seen the same road from Drusilla's pony-carriage, that bright morning in spring. He had scarcely nourished more hope then than now, and yet what a difference! Then, it is true, he did not possess her love—but now he had gained and lost her!

Bad conscience alone is not a disturber of sleep. Ruggiero lay awake through long nights, when sleep would have been such happiness, allowing him to forget his trouble for awhile. As it was, Drusilla's sweet voice sounded for ever in his ears, her lovely form was for ever present to his soul. Weary with the life he led, he fulfilled his duty with over-scrupulous fidelity. One evening he crossed the convent's corridor, and entered the church, where but a few women were still kneeling in unfeigned devotion. He entered a confessional, knowing that some of the poor creatures were sure to be in need of the priest's consoling words. A dark figure rose in one of the corners near the high altar, and whispering something to her companion, she walked with a weary step towards the confessional, which she must have seen the priest enter. She knelt down again, and hiding her face in her hands, sobbed bitterly. Ruggiero, whose heart ached more than ever, was near tears himself, but it was his duty to administer consolation, so he began to say in a whisper:

"Let me hear what distresses you. Perhaps religion has some balm for your wounds!"

Amid sobs a soft voice answered:

"The Church is itself the cause of my misery. I can hope nothing from it, and yet I have no other resting-place on earth, and must needs come to it."

Ruggiero had immediately recognised the voice of his beloved, and quite sure that if he spoke he must betray himself, he waited in silence for her further words, which, though they made him unhappier than ever, still thrilled through him, and gave him a vague sense of delight. He was not aware that Drusilla would not have approached the confessional had she not recognised his figure as he glided into it. It was to hear his dear voice once more that she knelt there, trembling and sobbing like a passionate child.

The long pause that ensued might have told him all. Less his wish to remain unknown than the ardent desire to hear her voice again made him say:

"Tell me, Madonna." Drusilla could contain herself no longer.

"Ruggiero!" she sobbed out, and then in so soft a whisper, only a lover's ears could distinguish the words, all the endearing terms which

her child's heart dictated, mingled with the tale of the sorrow she had endured for weeks past. Ruggiero leaned back half unconscious. When she ceased speaking, he felt faint and heartsick, from the effort of gaining mastery over a body which would have burst open the door of the confessional and borne that sweet kneeling figure away in its arms. She knew why he was silent, and she improved the occasion by asking him in passionate terms to meet her there every evening for the short time she still remained outside the walls of a cloister. He could not refuse her, for it was his own heart's wish she expressed. Besides, what danger could come to him or her, whom the chains of the Church held fast?

Thus the lovers met daily, and for an hour could converse on the past, leaving the desolate present and the hopeless future aside. They were never suspected. As the winter approached the afternoons grew shorter, the dark set in earlier, and the lovers' chances of being together improved. Drusilla mustered up her courage one day to tell Ruggiero that on Christmas-eve she would enter the convent, which, it is true, was situated but a few streets distant from Santa Philomena, but whose doors, once they had closed behind Drusilla, would part them as the grave alone can. They could no longer speak hopefully; despair counted the days still remaining, as though a death warrant awaited them at the end. One evening Drusilla came later than usual. She could scarcely walk to the confessional, and sobbed out to Ruggiero that her uncle had in a letter declared that he did not give his consent to her taking the veil, and would never again see her, if she persevered in her purpose. The young man clenched his fist, and with an angry movement unconsciously tore the texture of his priest's gown. He could not protect and cherish this poor young thing, whom all the world left lonesome. After having vented her grief in tears, Drusilla at last said:

"If I could but feel your hand in mine once more, if I could but look into your eyes, I should enter the convent with a lighter heart. I strain my eyes every evening, and yet I see nothing—nothing of you!"

It was what he himself had been wishing for months—to hold her in his arms once more, as on that day when she had drawn the confession of his love from him—then part for ever.

He asked her to stay in the church some time longer, then to pass through a side door into the arched square where the monks of Santa Philomena, who had lived and died here, reposed: some under the vaulted passages, others under the grass, which covered every distinction between their tombstones. This place was sometimes visited by persons seeking quiet for their pious prayer, but it was usually solitary.

Drusilla left her maid in the church and passed noiselessly down the few steps beyond the door, her heavy black dress trailing after her. She had thrown her veil over her face, and crossed one side

of the square with an unsteady step. But four lights excluded darkness, and they were hanging each to a centre column of the four vaults, lighting up some marble sculptures, mostly representing dead monks with haggard faces, and leaving all else around to darkness. Drusilla started as an arm passed softly round her waist and drew her onward, but she was reassured by a voice, choked with emotion, which tried to say :

"This is more than I had dared demand of life !"

How could those two young beings be so very, very happy, as the light in their eyes proved them to be ? It was an hour, and a place, and a situation that would make most young girls, brought up as Drusilla had been, shudder with fear. Yet what scene does not lose all its horror in the eyes of a girl when she may lean on the arm of her lover ? They passed but rarely under the light in the vault—darkness around them at most times, hiding them to view, when they would have been well worth seeing, as they clung to each other, as if it had been for life. For awhile they forgot all save the sweetness of the hour. Then Ruggiero's heart felt a pang that recalled him to the present and its dangers. He asked Drusilla :

"Which day do you enter your prison ?"

"This day week." She could scarcely falter as she clung to him tighter. She had nearly forgotten her fate.

"And we might have been so happy !" he sighed.

Drusilla pained him by saying : "If you had but dared ! I have been told that there are thousands, nay millions, who revere the same God as we do, and believe in the same Saviour, who would not think the less of you if you shook off your bonds ! We could live in Switzerland or England without a shadow of blame on our lives, if by our deeds we make them noble."

"Would you leave your home, Drusilla, for a strange land ?"

"With you a thousand times ! Your eyes are my heaven. If I have them I cannot turn home-sick. But do not let me make you unhappy. What is the use ——"

"We are in the hands of God, Drusilla. Those who have once entrusted themselves to His care must not turn back or repent."

"If He be what you have taught me to believe Him—He would not sever us. Oh, Ruggiero, I feel that my happiness with you would be worth all the saints' ecstasy in their solitary cells."

Drusilla stood opposite the lamp, whose light shone full upon her. Had she nourished one hope of still winning him when she came hither ? She looked so beautiful, so child-like in her black garments, that clung to her like a fated attire. Ruggiero looked upon her in silence as he stood opposite her. With a charming movement she leaned far back to the wall, touching the feet of a stone monk with her soft veiled hair—then she stretched both hands towards him, with a loving, supplicating look that thrilled him, and said plainer than words :

"Do not forsake me!"

Ruggiero gazed steadfastly upon her, and if he did not take her hands it was because his whole faculties were centred in his eyes. What at first seemed an effect of the flickering, unsteady light, became a fact. The wall behind Drusilla moved. The marble plate with the monk in relief upon it was slowly bending forward. Ruggiero gave one leap, encircled his darling's waist with one arm, and then spread out the other to keep the marble slab from falling. It was three feet from the ground, and must call the whole convent to the spot if it fell—and betray the lovers.

Drusilla had comprehended and stood behind Ruggiero, eager to help him if his strength proved inefficient in retaining the heavy marble plate. But Ruggiero's arm was strong as a young athlete's. Seeing that he could not fasten the tomb-plate in its place, he resolved to let it slide gradually to the ground, where it now alighted, without noise. But what ailed the lovers as they stood there, both pale as death?

The convent had revealed its secrets to them. Behind the marble tombstone was an empty space, and there crouched, as though they had been buried but yesterday, two of God's young creatures whom death could not sever. He, a young man in armour, with a vigorous form, his arm entwined round his companion—his long hair falling in fair locks on to her young bosom. She, a slender, youthful maiden—her head resting upon his bosom, both arms clinging to his neck—her light form in a nun's dress. They both gave so imposing a picture of what love can endure—of what love has endured—that the hearts of our two lookers-on trembled within them. Ruggiero was the first to move.

"Do you understand what these two tell us, in language too pathetic for a human heart?"

Drusilla's eyes lost their haggard look. She threw herself upon her lover's breast.

"You see the Church retains unwilling sons and daughters!"

"It shall not do so again, Drusilla. It shall not retain you or me. Let us go. No one will miss me, and when to-morrow they find these two they will tell them plainly *why* we fled. They will not dare to follow us."

He carried her to the church doorsteps, sustained her into the dark vaults once more. She beckoned to her maid, and left the dismal old building—which must centuries ago have heard the death-cry of those two lovers, and had not betrayed it—for her home. Ruggiero never left her side, and when the morning dawned they both looked upon a scene which had none of Verona's dismal walls even in the background. They fled: happy notwithstanding surrounding dangers; notwithstanding the picture of misery which rose before their eyes so often—which had been the cause of all their happiness.

Early the next morning mysterious rumours spread about the city of Verona. Sister Agnes had been still asleep when the young couple turned their steps towards happier regions. Her slumbers were broken by the announcement of a visit from the superior of Ruggiero's convent—while the servant at the same time gasped forth the news that the young countess and her maid had left the house before the dawn of day, and no one knew whither she had gone. The nun was so frightened that she ordered the superior to be introduced into her room before she rose from her bed. He told her that Ruggiero too was missing, and after severely reproving her for taking such indifferent care of the bird which had escaped them, he entrusted the secret of the grave in the vault to her. The superior had made his mind up to follow the fugitives, and to bring them back at what cost he might.

Ruggiero was quieting his fluttering bird by telling her over and over again that he had telegraphed to her uncle, who would meet them at the station, and conduct her safely to his house. But Drusilla was more frightened about her lover than about herself. She saw the hosts of monks grasping him, and not releasing him again. Sometimes she forgot her grief, and laughing merrily, never ceased to admire the young man who sat opposite to her—so handsome and stately in the garments that he had exchanged for the monk's gown.

When they had told all, Drusilla's uncle had not the heart to refuse his consent—he undertook to protect them, and did so in a gentlemanly and effective manner.

The day had not run to its close when the superior of the convent of Santa Philomena was announced in the palace of Drusilla's uncle. He was ushered into the library, an immense apartment, which awed even the monk, who was not unaccustomed to palatial dimensions. The old gentleman received him kindly, but apparently without a notion of what the purpose of the holy father's visit could be. The priest told in hard terms of one of his dependent's disobedience, and asked the old gentleman to give the truant up to his rightful superior. The gentleman courteously replied :

"You ask more of me than I can comply with. I know nothing of your dependent, except that he was once the teacher of my niece, who I hear is foolish enough to wish to enter a convent, whilst she might be the light of my eyes and the cherished wife of any man she pleases."

"Then they are not with you ! I have followed a false track and must turn back and begin afresh."

The priest rose and was about to go, when the gentleman, suddenly detaining him, began slowly, as though an idea had just struck him :

"I had intended paying you a visit the very next time I went to Verona. You will allow me to speak of the matter in my mind here. I found some old documents in my niece's library which highly interested me, and which, I believe, may be of interest to you

also. Some three hundred years ago a younger son of the house of the Portalupi, it is said, loved a young lady whose name is not mentioned in the documents, but who sprang from one of the best families of Verona. By a selfish vow of her mother's she was doomed to enter a convent; and, as nothing the young lovers could do succeeded in changing her fate, she obeyed and took the veil in the convent of Santa Philomena, which was then, as you know, a nunnery. The desperate young lover would not be consoled by his family, but determined to join the army, and to lend his strong arm to his country, since he could not be happy at home. With a single servant he left the palace of the Portalupi one night, dressed in armour and riding his best horse, and was seen no more. The servant returned a few days later, and told his master that the young knight had bidden him wait in a narrow lane, near the convent of Santa Philomena, and had returned no more. The family believed him to have joined the army alone, and sent his servant after him, but he never could be found. The army lists do not contain his name. There is nowhere a word or record of him, as either alive or dead. What do *you* think, holy father, became of him?"

The priest, upon this question being suddenly put to him, turned to ashy paleness, and found no answer. The gentleman continued:

"What I wish you to do is this. Look into the library of your convent, and see if the secret documents contain no clue to the disappearance of a young knight in armour. Something might have happened to him in the convent, you know, and I should be so glad to have light thrown upon this dark affair. And now I will detain you no longer. Should I chance to hear anything of your runaway brother I will not fail to send you word."

Bowing him out, the old gentleman could not refrain from smiling. He returned to the room where he had left the young fugitives sitting with their faces lighted up by smiles, on a low settee near an old-fashioned chimney, where a large log of wood burned brightly.

Not three months later the monk and would-be nun were man and wife. Drusilla's uncle would not say by what means he had made the Church's persecution cease. He was so happy in the grateful smiles they bestowed upon him that he hurried the preparations for their marriage, and would not rest until they were blessed.

He who once was Abbate Ruggiero is now a grand seigneur, who, with a proud face, drives the sweetest young wife, in the most sumptuous of equipages, past Rome's monumental buildings. At the Pincio they meet an old gentleman on horseback, who rides up to them and asks news of a fine little fellow in a cradle at home, who does not know what little chance of life he had some years ago. Sister Agnes is not this child's guardian. She has retired to the convent whence she came twenty years ago to darken Drusilla's now sunny life.

THE ORKNEY AND SHETLAND ISLANDS.

BY CHARLES W. WOOD, AUTHOR OF "THROUGH HOLLAND."

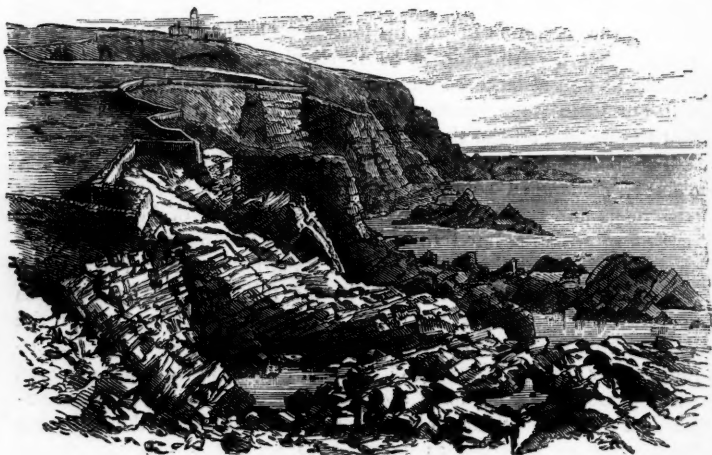
I LEFT Kirkwall for Shetland one Saturday morning. The day was bright and sunny, and all the world foretold a smooth passage. Once more all the world was wrong. The journey between the two archipelagos is often typical of the voyage of life: that vale of tears where each has to take the rough with the smooth, whether he will or no, and bear it with becoming fortitude: never telling where the shoe pinches; carefully concealing his skeleton in a well-closed closet; and assuming before his fellows a cheerful countenance and a merry heart. And this is as it should be: or would the world around us and at large be grave and sombre as mutes at a funeral, and our little stage become a typical churchyard: for it is certain that to one and all the shoe pinches somewhere.

The boat started at noon. She had come into Kirkwall at ten o'clock, discharged some of her cargo and cattle, landed sundry passengers and taken in others, stayed a couple of hours (a great portion of which seemed to be taken up in ringing a furious bell as an intimation that time was up), and departed again. The smooth passage of prophecy was rough in the fulfilment. The boat was again the *St. Magnus*, which must have made more martyrs than the Pagan church. Never was a boat so uncomfortable in its internal arrangements and the planning of its berths. Once more it was crowded with passengers, and once more the Scotch drovers made themselves a torment. It cannot be too clearly repeated that the Company are bound as speedily as possible to set right this disgraceful nuisance: the more so that the remedy is perfectly easy and at hand.

We left Kirkwall bound for Lerwick, the chief town or capital of the mainland of Shetland. As we receded from the harbour the town stood out in all its dull gloom, looking more than ever forlorn and deserted in contrast with the brilliant sky, the liquid, transparent water, the animated birds whirling around with wild clang. Beyond uprose the cathedral, a refuge for thought and attention whether in or out of the town; one of the last points, as it was the best, visible as we wandered on the "wide waste of waters" away from the little capital. My sojourn had been somewhat of disappointment—what else was possible with an incessant weeping and wailing of the elements?—and I wondered whether Shetland would prove a happier experience. At least I should have a better foothold in the place, for I was to take up my abode in a friend's lodgings: a more suggestive prospect than the unquiet of an inn: though there had been

little to complain of in the Kirkwall Hotel, and a good deal to praise.

We passed away from the islands. It was an eight hours' passage, so that we were due at Lerwick at eight at night. And here it may be mentioned, for the benefit of the unwise, that the *w* in Lerwick receives its full claims to pronunciation. The word is spoken with the two distinct syllables—Ler-wick: and not Lerrick, as I had generally heard it called until I visited these latitudes. The word wick, as many readers will know, signifies an open or exposed bay: but the origin of the word Lerwick has never been satisfactorily settled. It is supposed by some to take its name from Larwick, a small town near the Naze of Norway. Lerwick seems to have sprung into existence about the year 1670.

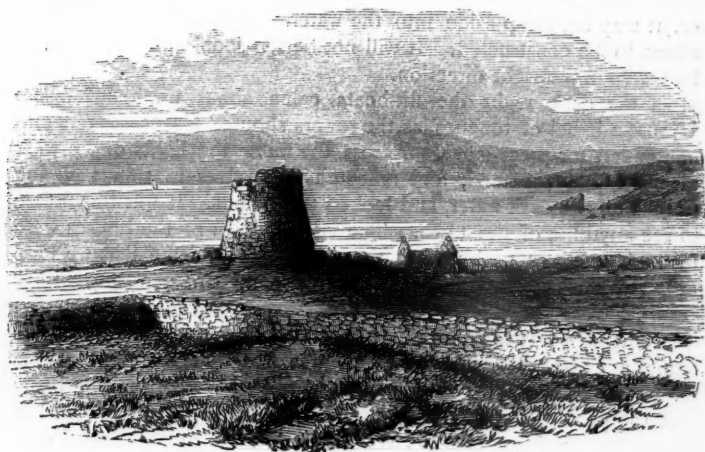


SUMBURGH HEAD, SHETLAND.

After we had left Kirkwall, the day soon clouded over; the sea became rough and unpleasant; the boat rolled and pitched in a horrible manner. Half way across, we passed Fair Isle: a small island that acts as a link between Orkney and Shetland, yet is more inaccessible than any island of the two groups. It rose almost perpendicularly out of the water to a considerable height: a lonely isle indeed. It is so difficult to land that this cannot be attempted in rough weather. For weeks at a time the inhabitants are cut off from all communication with the outer world. In calm water, when the steamer is sighted on her way from Orkney to Shetland, some of the men put off in boats, come alongside, and beg for newspapers and magazines: a practice less followed up now than it was a few years ago, when travellers were rare, and the advantages and facilities of the post of less frequent occurrence. The

island contains some two or three hundred inhabitants, amongst the most primitive and genuine of all the many islands. There is no resident minister, and the children are baptized in batches whenever one may chance to visit the island—a high day and holiday of strange advent. Marriages may be performed by the schoolmaster, in a civil kind of way; but the minister, who on his visit baptizes a crop of infants, frequently celebrates a second marriage to satisfy the scruples and tender consciences of sundry happy couples. May not Fair Isle be called a sixth division of the globe?

The island, rising out of the sea, looked a bright spot as we passed it: a solid rock of defence. The water dashed up to the foot of the craggs, and kept up an eternal plash that the people never hear, doubtless because they hear it always. The rains and the winds



BURGH OR CASTLE OF MOUSA.

beat upon the towering rocks, and the mists rise up and conceal it ever and anon; but it bids all defiance, and stands there a fortress of the ages, firm and sure.

Our boat ploughed onwards, and Fair Isle was left behind. The hours went on, and twilight gave place to darkness. In darkness and rolling the ship made way, and Sumburgh Head, the beginning of Shetland, was passed, and Mousa Island, and in due time Bressay lighthouse, at the entrance to Lerwick harbour. Suddenly, when it was nearer ten o'clock than nine, we entered into calm water, and most of the passengers crowded on deck. As the steamer dropped anchor with a rattling of chains, a gun boomed forth from her decks: signal to the people of Lerwick that passengers and mails were about to land. We were in the harbour and Sound: land-locked on all sides, as far as could be seen in the dark night.

The scene was weird and strange. Somewhere or other there lurked a feeling of being entirely separated from mankind and the civilised world. Communication with Shetland is less frequent than with Orkney. There a daily mail comes into Stromness, but in Shetland you have it but twice a week, and this only in summer. In winter, when seas are rough, and passengers are few, and cargo is scanty, the steamers and the mails go to Lerwick only once a week.

A scene weird and unusual. On the dark water a number of boats—called flit-boats—were quickly approaching from the shore, and crowded round the steamer. This is the only mode of landing the passengers, for Lerwick has no pier: It is eminently disagreeable. Fine or rain, ill or well, you have to look after your luggage, collect it together, grope down the ladder, and jump into a fast-filling boat; or, it may be, jump aside into the water. It is said that a pier is about to be constructed. It will not be too soon, and will certainly be a step in the right direction.

In the dark night the flit-boats came about us like locusts. Uprose a babel of tongues as the rowers shouted for passengers and contended for precedence. Across the water the lights of Lerwick gleamed and gloomed, and reflected themselves in thin wavering streaks on the dark water, and looked mysterious. It was impossible to see anything of the town. The very outlines of the houses were lost. There was nothing but these lights to indicate that we were near any place possessing local habitations and a name of mysterious origin.

A boatman was to come off to meet me, and on shouting out his name, a cheery "Ay, ay, sir!" came back in answer. A few moments and I was on the dark water, rowing away from the boats and the people to a landing-place near to my friend's lodgings. A happy chance, these lodgings. Never had I felt more in need of a night's rest and solitude. Never so thankful to shake off a boat and its associations: not even on the day I had reached Kirkwall after the passage from Aberdeen. But for this friendly harbour of refuge, neither rest nor solitude would have been found that night. Lerwick is not so expanding as Kirkwall, and the place was full. The passengers who went to the hotel were put as many as three, four, and five in a bedroom, friends and strangers, known and unknown alike. This is a Shetland and Orkney custom, and often has to be endured unless you are willing to take the alternative of sitting up all night. You are at the mercy not only of a very independent people, but of a people whose resources are limited. Remonstrance is useless. You cannot take the next train onwards or homewards, for there is no train, and no "onwards," and you must stay where you are, at least until the next outgoing steamer. Luckily such unpleasant experience was never mine, yet it must have been that night, but for my friend's thrice blessed, thrice welcome quarters. Most of the boats

went one way, and we went another, and I was right glad to put my foot on land. Lerwick was in darkness and gloom.

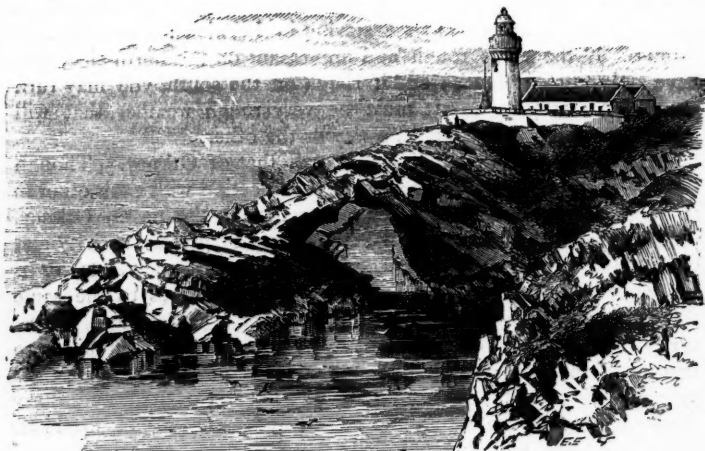
The next morning the scene in front disclosed itself at once as interesting and picturesque. Before us was Bressay Sound, the large sheet of water forming the harbour. On the opposite side, a mile across, rose the island of Bressay, which closes in the water on the west side, as Lerwick does on the east, and helps to form one of the finest natural harbours to be seen. Here boats ride at anchor perfectly protected, whilst, outside, the sea may be raging and boiling and dashing itself against the bold rocks. Not that it is never rough in the harbour; that would be impossible in so extensive a sheet of water. It is rough enough sometimes to render crossing from Lerwick to Bressay in a small boat dangerous, and sometimes impossible. Lerwick harbour has two entrances, north and south, a fact of especial use to anyone staying in Lerwick for boating and fishing. If the sea is rough and unpleasant on the north side, you have only to steer south; and if rough on the south, you may turn your boat northwards. It must be very rough weather that will prevent you from sailing out one way or the other.

The history of Shetland is very much that of Orkney. Though the two groups of islands disclaim any connection with each other in the present, they are closely linked together in the past. Orkney, perhaps, took the lead, and was the scene of greater activity and importance. Shetland is the Ultima Thule of the ancients, or is supposed to have been, which in history often comes to the same thing: especially in these days, when men of a restless and radical turn of mind hunt up old documents and peer into dim archives to contradict long undisputed facts. Thus it is possible that we shall presently discover that Mary Stuart was never executed, and Mary Tudor was a firm Protestant, and Elizabeth did not patronise red hair and black teeth, and Queen Anne was a woman of genius. Several passages in Virgil refer to Ultima Thule, and the title is recognised and used by other ancient writers.

Shetland has no separate history from Orkney. It is less favoured in some respects, and possesses less traces of a past importance. Thus it has no cathedral in which you may take sanctuary for a brief spell from the more commonplace surroundings; but it has remains of antiquities in a state more or less perfect. There are the remains of the burgh or castle on the small island of Mousa, where Harold took refuge when he pursued his mother Margaret, and Erlend, from Orkney. These burghs, as they are called, are the oldest monuments in the island, and that on Mousa is the most perfect. It has, from a distance, the appearance of a low round tower, is built of dry stone walls of immense strength, and commands the position it seems destined to protect. Such perfect Pictish or other remains as Maeshowe or the Standing Stones of Stennis in Orkney, do not exist in Shetland. The burghs are

numerous and seem to have been so placed as to keep up a constant communication with each other : thus linking the islands, and the different parts of each separate island, together.

But if Orkney plays a somewhat prominent part in the history of the past, Shetland possesses many advantages in the present. A glance at Lerwick the day after my arrival showed that it bore a strong resemblance to Stromness in Orkney. They are all very much alike, the principal towns in these islands ; all built on the edge of the water, the ground rising up behind them ; the houses all of the same dull grey granite stone ; all consisting of one long, irregular street, all angles and abutments, with sundry narrow off-shoots in the shape of narrow courts and alleys that lead away from the town, and land you amidst newer houses that are beginning to



BRESSAY LIGHTHOUSE, AT THE ENTRANCE TO LERWICK HARBOUR.

struggle into number. The town of Lerwick is almost the ugliest of all, but its situation is far before Kirkwall or Stromness. Its surroundings, estimating things by comparison, are beautiful. Its fine natural harbour ; the opposite and surrounding islands ; the wavy undulations of the land on all sides ; and beyond and above all this, the magnificent rock scenery that lies in all directions when once you are out of the Sound. Orkney, for its rock scenery, cannot be compared with Shetland. I know not what coast would stand the test of comparison. We hear much of the rocks of North and South Cornwall, and of Devonshire ; the beauties of Ilfracombe and its neighbourhood ; but nothing of all this ever impressed me to anything like the same extent as the rocks of Shetland.

As in Orkney, so in Shetland, no trees are to be seen. The eye

may wander where it will, and find no shade from the summer heat, no wayside refuge from the stormy blast. Long lines of undulations, here rough and abrupt, there waving and continuous, cleave the sky; great tracks of barren and uncultivated land on all sides. In this, Shetland is very different from Orkney. There you have semi-cultivation: not smiling plains and rich cornfields, but plains and fields that would be smiling and rich if they could, and attempt it. In Shetland very little cultivation is visible. Consequently a solemn gloom and certain grandeur is more apparent; the idea and aspect of intense solitude are much heightened; a feeling of the utmost repose, though joined to a slight suspicion of monotony. Long stretches of moorland with rich blooms that blend wonderfully with the blue sky and the white floating clouds. Hills and hollows



TOWN HALL, LERWICK.

undulate around all covered with the rich purple gorse that shelters the scanty amount of game, that here forms the sole delight and resource of the sportsman. You may wander over many and many a mile of hill and dale, and plunge through the gorse, and now and then get swamped in a morass, and sometimes for your reward come home at night with your bag full, and sometimes return empty-handed. And you may roam from early morning to the fast gathering shades, when the birds have gone to roost and are too cunningly nested to be seen or disturbed, and by chance never meet a soul. Mile after mile of solitary moorland, and no one to exchange a word with; no sound to break the silence save the popping of your own gun, or the shrill clang of a gull winging its flight across the island, watching your every motion with its keen little eyes, and keeping wisely and well out of shot.

Or suddenly a raven starts across your path with a hoarse croak, and spreading his strong black wings, looks a magnificent creature as he tries to escape. But you are ready for any surprise, and before he is out of range, down he comes, and turning over and over falls with a dull thud upon the earth, that knocks the remaining life and breath out of him, and terminates his wild career. But it must be a bad day's sport that permits you to drop upon the fine fellow; sad want of a shot at *something*, or perhaps the necessity of discharging a barrel; for gulls and ravens are scarcely legitimate prey, unless wanted for such purposes as mounting or winging.

All this heathery moorland in autumn turns to a rich brown in the process of fading, and in every direction the tints of a declining year meet the eye. In your walks you notice, from the brow of a hill, how harmoniously this purple or brown heather blends with the sea—for there the sea is. You cannot, at any time, get very far away from it in these islands; if you are turning your back upon it in one direction it is only to meet it in another; there it ever is, calm and placid, and of exquisite tints, or restless and raging, according to its mood. And its mood on one side or the other is, more often than not, angry and disturbed: so that the waves beat themselves against the rocks with a noise of thunder, and whirl and seethe around the skerries, and rush into the caverns as if they would shake their very foundations. Woe betide the craft that at such times ventures too near shore.

But on a bracing, breezy day, with plenty of sun to gild the sky and water, and tip the gorse with gold, from these hills how clear and sweet the air. Around you nothing but solitude, nothing but earth and sea and sky: "le grand air," as the French happily put it, in an untranslatable expression. Who can render "le grand monarque" into its equivalent, its perfect meaning? And here in Shetland all this wealth of nature and colouring seems to have been made for you, and for you alone. The whole earth, sea, and air are yours, to breathe and revel in with a full sense of keen enjoyment. Every nerve in the body responds to the appeal; drinks in the almost intoxicating, almost fragrant breeze. Each day the brain and the sinews seem to gain fresh tone and strength, to return home like a giant refreshed. Metaphorically speaking, as few of us, alas, are gifted with giant brains. There is no time for solid development in these fast days. Once upon a time intellect reached its full maturity with due deliberation—like the aloe that takes a hundred years to blossom: it was a matter of "precept upon precept, here a little, and there a little:" but in these later days—*latter* days, as some people would have it written—our development is of that rapid kind that, like the candle burnt at both ends, it dies out ere its task of lighting and enlightening the world has been accomplished.

It is certain that he who burns the candle at both ends, or consumes the midnight oil, cannot do better than go up to Shetland to

recruit. He will spend his days out of doors, tramping over moors, or over well-made roads, with an amusement that at once commands the attention, yet rests and invigorates the brain in a marvellous manner. And on land he may vary his occupation by fishing, if he loves the pastime. There are many well-stocked fresh water lakes with abundance of trout that, in some seasons, and, indeed, as a rule, yield excellent sport. Or if at any time weary of the mainland, he may take passage in the little steamer that goes up to the North Isles, and landing at Unst, the most northern of all, find himself at the very Ultima Thule of civilised boundaries, if not much beyond the line, and enjoy there still better fishing than in the lakes of the mainland. It need not be said that to endure the discomforts, the roughing-it-in-the-bush kind of life of Unst, a man must be an adept in the art of fishing; his whole heart must be in his work; he must thoroughly understand his craft. The delicate manipulation of the flies, the patience required to make and replace those you lose by chance or accident; for the stock, in some way or other, is always diminishing, and one hardly knows how—like the pins that are always disappearing, nobody knows where, or the unpleasant people that are always turning up at the wrong time, nobody knows why. He must know that a certain fly will only do for a certain fish, and a certain tint for a certain greyness or brightness of sky. A true disciple of Isaak Walton will learn all this, not only by practice, but by instinct; almost more, indeed, by instinct than practice. Some men become fishermen as if they were born to it: they fit into the groove as though it had been made for them, whilst others will never be good at the sport with all the trying and striving in the world. The latter would do well to turn to shooting, or to deep sea fishing, for this last requires more patience than skill, and the result is closely allied to the doctrine of chances. I have been out at sea for hours, and caught nothing; and again, I have thrown in a line with a score of hooks, and in two minutes have drawn up a good fish for every bait.

I have said that in Unst you have to rough it, and that to a great degree. Indeed, unless you have secured a room, or happen to know anyone who will put you up—such, for instance, as the minister—the chances are that you will have to sleep on board the little steamer, and go back to Lerwick on her return journey. There is scant accommodation in Unst, and during the season as many men go up there to fish as can possibly find resting-place: a shake-down, on which to vary the perpendicular position they have delighted in all day. For men—so inconsistent are we—will take any amount of trouble and hard work for amusement that they would never dream of enduring in a matter of duty. A certain friend living in a country village was once in the habit of going out into the road and breaking stones for his pleasure. Had it suddenly become a matter of necessity to him, how long would the enjoyment have lasted? So

much are we the creatures of fancy and imagination. Our pleasures frequently depend upon a certain peculiarity of temperament so subtle and imaginative that it may be likened to the delicate colour of certain flowers, that, with nightfall, ceases to exist because unseen. In like manner, to take a somewhat less refined example, a smoker will tell you that if it is too dark to see the smoke coming out of his mouth, all enjoyment of his pipe is at an end.

So with the fragrant weed the smoker's fancy blends :
When darkness veils the smoke, in smoke enjoyment ends.

But in every part of the Shetland Islands, including the little capital, the traveller must expect to rough it more or less. Life here is not a bed of roses : soft couches and luxurious chambers are happily unknown. It is a very different life from that of refined and fashionable haunts. A life more hardy, more bracing, morally and physically, than will be found within sight of Hyde Park or Piccadilly. All they who cannot do without these luxuries, and the delicacies of the table, must either refrain from going, or take them with them. But there are certain things that are not precisely luxuries, yet make weight and add considerably to the merits of a breakfast or dinner-table, that a man may carry up with him and be none the worse for—such as a fitch of bacon and a Stilton cheese : unknown commodities in Shetland. That is, if he is going up to lodgings. At an inn you are naturally at the mercy of your host, and must take such fare as he will provide. For in Lerwick you cannot write out your own daily menu. It will probably chance that the things on which you have set your affections are one and all not forthcoming. Thus, if you wish for beef, mutton will surely be in the market ; and if you ask for fish you will probably find it a thing of yesterday or to-morrow.

Fish is not to be had in great variety in Shetland. Herrings abound, and when plentiful need not be bargained for. Twelve and even twenty may be bought for a penny. Fresh from the sea and well-cooked, you will not meet with a greater delicacy in the islands. There are also mackerel and cod-fish, but turbot is scarce. Meat is not very good or fine. Our landlady would occasionally bring up a sirloin of beef for dinner that was just enough for two, and nothing over but the bones. So with a leg or shoulder of mutton. The meat was very sweet in flavour, but, from its smallness, possessed no great amount of nourishment. It is therefore not altogether a land rich in marrow and fatness, or flowing with milk and honey. And this reminds me that milk was both dear and difficult to procure. Many a morning at ten o'clock we had either still to wait for breakfast, or take our coffee without milk. There is no regular dairy in or near the town. To bacon and Stilton cheese, add tins of condensed milk.

You may live very healthily and economically in Lerwick provided you take lodgings. The inns, though not possessing exactly the

comforts and refinements of a metropolitan hotel, do not exercise a precisely similar moderation in their charges. Perhaps it cannot be expected of them. Lodgings are excessively scarce, and the inns as a rule are the only refuge for the destitute. Lerwick has not enlarged and expanded after the manner of our popular watering-places. It would scarcely pay to build houses for that purpose : at least the conclusion appears to be justified by the fact : and the inhabitants in a general way have only such accommodation as their own domestic arrangements require. Such lodgings as exist are of the humblest description and are only to be put up with because better cannot be found. Nevertheless, in a very short time you cease to care for the luxuries you have left behind you : the soft carpets and downy cushions, the objects of art and virtue, that may or may not decorate the walls, the nooks and crannies, of the little local habitation each one calls home. Your life and enjoyment and occupation in Shetland must depend upon something quite outside these habits and influences : and luckily upon things that are in themselves more healthily attractive. After a long day spent out in the open air, tramping over mile after mile of hill and moorland with a gun over one shoulder and a game-bag over the other—for you must be your own keeper—or after standing many hours in or out of the water, at the by no means inarduous task of fly-fishing, it will be strange if a cane-bottomed chair will not be as easy as a spring lounge, or a hard bed as productive of refreshing, uninterrupted sleep as the softest down that ever enervated the frame of man in this luxury-loving nineteenth century. Luxurious, indeed. Of one nation steeped in the vice there remains a name ; of another a ruin ; what in the end thereof will be the fate of favoured England ?

The luxuries of Shetland are what some people would never dream of. One morning—I had been in Lerwick about ten days—our landlady brought up for breakfast a well-grilled bird. “She thought we might like a scorie by way of a change.” In my ignorance, I knew not then the meaning of a scorie. Upon asking my friend opposite he replied with much clearness : “What is a scorie ?—why—just a scorie.” I concluded it was some kind of game peculiar to Shetland—and I had already discovered that dainties were rare and that nothing must be too rashly despised. It was very good ; tender and delicate ; and in the end I learned that it was nothing but a young sea-gull : a gull of the first year : when its feathers are yet gray, and it has not long used its wings. Most people would dislike the idea of eating a sea-gull : perhaps I should have done so in any other place than Shetland : I can only say that I returned to the charge another day, and without reluctance. It is a very eatable bird, without suspicion of fishiness, unless cooked when a little too old.

The Shetlanders will not, as a rule, eat these scories. They go farther and fare worse—much worse. Whilst despising scories

which are easily obtained, they will take a great deal of trouble to secure a young cormorant. They cook and eat these cormorants, which are coarse, impossible food to anyone but a Shetlander. They also make them into a soup which they think delicious: a strong, unctuous liquid that, from its appearance, must possess some of the more wholesome, though not agreeable qualities of cod-liver oil.

In Shetland as in Orkney, peat is largely used for fuel. Great tracts of land become mere peat-bogs that perhaps with care and drainage might give place to a more smiling vegetation: the waving stems and stalks of the coarser grains. But the aspect of the island gains in gloom and grandeur by remaining in its present pristine condition. And you do, in Shetland, gain this sense of grandeur, that Orkney has very much lost by its semi-cultivation. It is bolder in its outlines, and gives you an idea of much greater space and extent. Wildness and desolation are on all sides apparent: an intense rest and repose to the spirit, which revels in this strange and uncommon appearance, and enjoys it to the full. I know not what the ideas of the Shetlanders themselves may be: those present "lairds" who replace the old "udaller" of a century or two ago: probably they would like a little more life and animation, and a little less of the desolate and monotonous element: the *mal-du-pays* of the Montagnard is doubtless an unknown disease with them, when they exile themselves from their native hills and valleys and lochs. But to a sojourner for a time amongst these same hills and valleys, this wild and barren grandeur is the first and great attraction of the islands. The waving fields of grain referred to would destroy the present fine effect. Yet Shetland is not escaping the march of progress: and a future generation will probably see a great change therein.

The making and getting of peat gives occupation to a large number of men and women. A good deal of it is cut in the spring and dries during the summer. In some parts of the island (we are speaking of the mainland) large tracts are marked out into sections, and a section is given over to a man or woman, and what they can make of it becomes their own. Again with some it becomes an article of trade, and is probably lucrative. These tracts interfere with the growth of the heather. In the districts you see small mounds of black peat, and long rows of turf turned over in straight regular lines: and you may watch the men and women at work. Towards evening, when work is over, if you happen to be going that way, you will meet the women returning homewards, many of them walking one behind another like a string of turkeys. And in their sable appearance they are not unlike those unwise birds. Their dress is plain, and often poverty-stricken in appearance: and the forlorn look of the women is heightened by the universal practice of the Shetland women of throwing a shawl over their heads when they go out of doors, in place of the ordinary bonnet.

The women returning home from the peat fields are a picturesque

object. In the first place their appearance exactly blends and harmonises with the surrounding country. They partake of the gloom which characterizes the hills and valleys, and this adds much, though the reader may be unable to realise it, to their attraction. A fashionably-dressed woman would look almost out of place in these wild regions: the peat-women excite interest by their quaintness, and also give rise to a feeling of compassion by their meek aspect of endurance. One thought that strongly forces itself upon reflection at sight of them is the variety and inequality of human lots; far less unequal doubtless, to use a well-worn phrase, than man with limited vision is able to discover. Could we collect the links that form each life, connect them, and at one glance read the story they tell, mysteries would disappear, and most lives prove probably a tale of simple cause and effect. Although links in past generations might be required to make the story complete.

But the lives of these peat men and women are simple and uneventful enough. The chain is a very short one and the links are not scattered. They go forth to their daily work and return to their daily rest, and have no thoughts or ambitions beyond. Their aspect, I have said, is picturesque. They are of all ages, some young, others bending under the weight of years. There they go, one after another, with their baskets, or kishies, as they are called, fastened upon the back by means of a strap over each shoulder, rising above their heads, and piled up with squares of black peat. This naturally gives them all a stooping position, suggestive of hard work and feminine weakness, that quickly appeals to the sympathies. Many of them wear shoes made of cowhide, strong and cheap, perhaps, but without form, and with small pretensions to neatness and cleanliness. And these they often "save" by carrying them in their hands. Many, too, are without stockings, and they trudge along bare-footed and bare-legged, and only look in consequence the more poverty-stricken. Their petticoats are short, and generally of some dark, coarse material, with the colour of which the peat-getting sufficiently harmonises. Upon their heads they wear the inevitable kerchief of thick Shetland wool, generally grey, but sometimes red. Their faces are sunburnt and weather-beaten. Those of the old women are often strangely and wonderfully wrinkled; which with their bent attitude gives them a look of extreme age, and almost decrepitude. The younger women are many of them handsome: I saw a few really beautiful faces. As they go along the road nearly all are knitting stockings or some other article for wear. They appear to knit by instinct: an hereditary gift. Their heavy loads and somewhat difficult progress in no way seem to interfere with the flying needles. These never arrest their motion as their owners for a moment raise their heads as you pass, and wish you good day: or, it may be, turn round to look after the stranger or the gun—no doubt the gun.

This is the simple life of some of these people. In the capital itself there is, in a small way, bustle, excitement, and competition; yet, as far as I could discover, a feeling of cordiality and general good fellowship amongst themselves. It would be inconvenient for an insulated people to be always on the quarrelsome side of human nature. They cannot quietly pack up their goods and chattels and remove to the next town without first crossing the water and turning themselves into exiles. So they make a merit of necessity, and live peaceably together; each occupied with his own business rather than his neighbour's, whereby scandals and backbitings and the petty details of a provincial state of society are unknown. They work to some purpose, too, and accumulate fortunes. It is not uncommon to be told that the owner of that dingy and dismal-looking house, now coming out at his door, and looking rather pitiable in the way of garments, is the comfortable possessor of a little nest-egg of a hundred thousand pounds, scraped together by industry and economy. Amongst the more wealthy any attempt at fashion or display is carefully eschewed: and a coachman in livery or a page in buttons would be looked at as a strange production that had suddenly sprung up in the night like a mushroom, and might be expected to disappear as rapidly.

All this is very delightful by contrast, and for a change. Decidedly they have the best of it, these far off, simple-minded, hospitable Shetlanders; for are we not beginning to discover that it is better, individually and nationally, to err on the side of simplicity than to go to the opposite extreme? Without returning to the customs of Adam and Eve (or what would become of the silkworms and the tailors?), we should do well no doubt to go back to some of the less luxurious customs of our forefathers. This, however, is not likely to be. The tide of circumstance and progress is too strong to flow backwards. Apparently the rocks of mental and moral self-restraint have been swept away by the ever on-coming waters of destiny, and a receding and exalting era can only dawn with a decline of national prosperity—an evil of another kind.

So they who languish for the simple pleasures of life may go up to Shetland and find them there; but as good seldom comes without a mixture of evil, they must be content to renounce many things we now look upon as necessities: first and foremost the higher intellectual enjoyments of life. Yet these pages have little to do with this theme; after all, perhaps an unprofitable one, because unalterable. Their purpose is to endeavour to state things as they are, rather than to draw comparisons that must generally be more or less invidious. I have no space to enlarge upon other themes, which must be left to another paper.

LE CERCLE AUX DEMOISELLES.

IT is a trite saying that one half of the world is ignorant of how the other half lives. For which reason, and because it is always interesting to study, when we can, the hidden forces which are quietly working on our social fabric, we submit the few following extracts from the carefully kept diary of a young lady moving in polite society. How it came into our possession is not for us to say. Suffice it that we break no pledge and hurt no one's feelings by making it public.

Monday. We have started our "cercle." Diana is to be our president. Who so fit as Diana—our poetess! Taller than the majority of women, with her rich black hair, and eyes wandering and restless, yet flashing with an indescribable lustre when she has grasped her idea; clad, as she generally is in the evening, in her long black velvet dress, a veritable priestess. Our rules are to meet once a month to discuss arts, literature, politics, and science, as more particularly affecting woman's position and duties in life. After the discussion half an hour's reading from some solid book. Each member to read each month at the least three articles in the *Contemporary Review*. Sisters Beatrice and Hilda have joined; and Mary Butterworth, who is awfully clever, paints beautifully, knows algebra, and has read Paley, Gibbon, and Herbert Spencer, and all such books; and Fanny K., who has written something for a paper. In all we are ten; and I was elected—I, who never read, and know nothing; but I am so glad. I must and will read hard.

Wednesday. Our first discussion—subject, "Dress." We all think dress should be as simple as possible, and agree to dress as simply as possible ourselves. Should all the members of our "cercle" dress alike? suggests our president. Negatived, as the same colour would not suit all the members. Or, suggests sister B., shall we all wear some distinguishing badge, a ribbon, or locket, or charm, to show that we are a united "cercle," and to suggest constantly to our minds the standard of life we have adopted? After much discussion, negatived. There is just a chance of our arranging for all to do our hair the same way, with a pledge, of course, to wear no pads.

Mary B. read Tyndall's essay on miracles.

Wednesday. Read minutes of last meeting (this sounds grand). We have each read three articles in the *Contemporary* since last meeting. Subject, the "Neighbourhood." Carried unanimously that it would be the better for more meetings like ours. Question, should we admit more members to our "cercle:" no, because everyone is so frivolous. We repeat conversations heard at our last dance.

Fanny K. says she heard from a friend that the Miss Marplots said we dressed very badly? The Miss M.'s think of nothing but dress, and do not understand simplicity. Resolution proposed, that we do not imitate the neighbourhood in talking scandal, or in the rapidity of our conversations at dances; also that we must look outside the neighbourhood for the field of our work.

Reading from "Sartor Resartus."

Friday. Saw Cyril Harcourt at the Blatherbys' ball. We talked about simplicity in dress. Told him of our "cercle." He asked why we did not like simplicity in language: he supposed "cercle" meant club; why not say club? I told him it was from old association. We had all read a book where revolutionists met at cercles. He likes things done for association's sake. He says we ought to dress "in the fashion, but not of the fashion;" we must not be too "simple" (query, a pun meant) about our dress. A nun, he says, dresses simply, and yet you could pick her out amongst a thousand. You could never dance more than twice running with a nun; everyone would spot you.

Wednesday. Subject, "Marriage." We have all agreed to remain unmarried. There are plenty of girls only too glad to marry. We shall do more good as we are. Diana read us a poem of her own on marriage. We are all to read Tennyson's "Princess" carefully through before next meeting, and give our opinions on it then. One of the Marplot girls is just engaged to Charlie Q. He has not many brains: this is the general opinion. Mary B. danced with him once; he had never heard of Fichte! We read through the marriage service, Sisters B. and Hilda taking the different parts. Unanimously agreed that the wording of the wife's pledge is calculated to degrade the relation of woman towards man.

Tuesday. Fortnightly dance to-night. Very awkward! Cyril H. asked me what our last discussion was. I got very hot, and said, "Marriage." "And what did you carry unanimously?" he asked. "That none of us should ever marry." "Poor things," he muttered. I flared up, and said we were nothing of the sort: we had all thought about life, and that was our mature judgment. He said he referred to the men. I agreed with him there, for Diana and Sister B. would make splendid wives; how queenly they would look at the head of their tables. He said he was not thinking of them particularly.

Wednesday. Subject, "Woman's Duties." Diana was absent, staying at the Gilliflowers. M. B. in the chair. It is very curious, but we all believe that Diana is in love with Mr. Padusoy. He preaches at the Silver Street Chapel, and, though in the Church, is very unorthodox. He has lovely eyes and a divine voice. His sermons are very beautiful. I wish I could remember them all through the week. She has gone into town every Sunday for the last three months to hear him. It seems she sent him a copy of

her poems, and also asked for his advice, frankly telling him all her unorthodox views. He has sent back her poems with much praise, underlining what he approves of. We wonder what will come of it all. How nice! But then our resolution. Shall we ask her? No, we agree to wait at present, but one of us is to go each Sunday to Mr. Padusoy's chapel. Woman has a noble future. Fanny K. asks if we will help at some tea-drinkings in her father's poor parish; some of us to read, others to show the "wheel of life," &c. We agree. It will be very delightful. We shall be quite out of the neighbourhood. Her father is a very nice man, a Dissenter, and so not at all orthodox. Our opinion on the "Princess," that it has a very sad ending. These tea-drinkings may lead to work. We all long for real hard work. Read some of Kingsley's "Yeast."

Thursday. We had to go to the Harcourts to dinner. Sister B. and I were sent. I told Cyril of our intended tea-drinking work. He approves of it. "They do the same thing, though, in your own parish," he remarked. "Ah, but so differently. All the girls go for is to show off their dresses and flirt: not to look after the poor people." "Yes," he said, "you are right to leave your parish. It is the correct thing now. We all go to Thorleigh to church; all the Thorleigh people come here. No parish, I suppose, is a prophet in its own county." "You speak bitterly, Mr. Harcourt," I said. "No, only sarcastically. The great thing after all is to do something. Never mind if it is not done quite close home—it is better than doing nothing." I like Mr. Harcourt.

Wednesday. Subject, "Conversation," but we talked on various topics. Diana told us of a recent dinner-party talk. She got riled with old Mr. Botherby (our vicar) because he said something against Dissenters, and she said across the table that she loved Gladstone and Bright, and that disestablishment must soon come, and that apostolic succession was all humbug. Mr. Quaverly made it worse for her by saying, in loud apology, "Miss Diana doesn't really mean it." We gave Diana a special vote of thanks and condolence. In future we are to be very discreet in our talk; not to throw pearls before swine, as Mary B. said. Work is coming in now. The tea-drinking was so successful that it is to be repeated once a fortnight through the winter, and we are all to help. There is a talk of a school for girls in the poorest district, and some chance of a temperance public-house there. Hurrah for work!

Tuesday. Another fortnightly. Asked all my partners if they had read the last *Contemporary*. Nine had not: two had. Cyril H. read one of the latter. He approves of temperance public-houses. Without clerical supervision? I ask. Certainly, he replied. We then discussed Communism and Mazzini, and afterwards John Stuart Mill. I regret I have not read more of him.

Wednesday. Another "cercle," so lovely, the cosey room, and the red firelight. We sit in the old nursery and make a half-circle

round the fireplace. Subject, "Belief." We had a long talk about many things. We seem all very sceptical. We don't believe in the vicar; he has such remarkable whims about the garden of Eden. We don't believe in our late governess's theory of history. We don't believe in all the Fathers. Resolved that we must beware of being sceptical without reason; that the attainment of truth must be our sole aim. Question raised, do we believe in ghosts? The evening was closing in then, and the firelight was flickering on the wall. We are not sure. Curious how the surroundings affect one. Sister B. tells a ghost story, how an officer, shot in India, galloped up to the door of his sweetheart in England at the very time of his death. We cannot account for that. Diana tells us she believes in spiritualism. She has heard, in a dark séance, heavy chairs rise and place themselves on the table. We cannot account for that. Diana says there are forces working around us of which we have no notion, which will some day be discovered. To these spiritualism pertains. Fanny R. told us a curious anecdote about "Planchette," in which she believes. Lit the gas, and Sister Hilda, who will take a comic view of things, read "Artemus Ward at a Séance."

Sunday. Sister B. and I went to the Silver Street Chapel. A lovely sermon, but aimed, we really thought, at Diana. Can it be? We wonder very much.

Monday. Such an evening. At the Jorleys. I was going to refuse Cyril any more dances. We were sitting in the conservatory, that is, the inner one, behind the tree fern. He told me the story of "The Lady of Lyons." He had seen Fechter as Claude Melnotte. He told it so beautifully all through. I was in an agony until the end came; and then—I found my hand in his, and he asked me, I know not how, if I could love him. "I am not like Claude Melnotte, a gardener, you know, but I am as fully unworthy of your love as he was of Pauline's." We sat there for three or four dances and then came out separately. I am so happy.

Wednesday morning. Oh, horror! A "cercle" meeting this afternoon. Subject, "Woman's Position," and I am pledged not to marry. I met Cyril accidentally on the way to his station. He says I must pass a resolution annulling the previous one. He was very nice in saying we would have a home "cercle" of our own soon, and discuss no end of literature, art, politics, &c.

Thursday. We had the club meeting yesterday. Carried unanimously that we may marry, and yet that it were better not to (this latter part not unanimously). I got Diana to propose this. She was quite willing to, saying, "Child, that was a foolish resolution of ours." Can this elderly sister of ours have ulterior views for herself? She is *not* going to the Silver Street Chapel next Sunday.

We find no more reference to "cercle" meetings for some eight weeks—due, perhaps, to Christmas intervening; there are, however,

numerous notices of unorthodox tea-drinkings at which the members of the "cercle" helped; also a regular bi-weekly visit to a temperance public-house called the British Waterman. In January we find one meeting at which is discussed the ways and means for a Christmas-tree for poor children. The next is in the middle of February.

Wednesday. Resumed our club meetings. Subject, "Women's Suffrage Bill." Somehow the meeting seemed flat. All the old arguments for and against were trotted out. Diana very strong for having a vote. Afterwards talked of Miss Octavia Hill's "Homes of the London Poor." Mary B. hopes to help in a court. I wonder whether Cyril would buy a court. It would be great fun to work it together and it would pay him five per cent. on his money. I must ask him to-morrow.

The following entries mostly record visits to the B. W. (as the British Waterman is always styled), French lessons in preparation for a foreign trip, and shopping with mamma, and sometimes with Cyril. There is no mention of the "cercle" until April 13th.

Wednesday. Last meeting of the "cercle." No subject, but a long cosey talk, going over the past, and looking into the future. I felt very much like crying all the time. We have had a very happy girlhood; I feel loth to leave it behind, and often wonder what my new life will be like. There will be no more meetings. Mary B. is going to Rome to study painting, Sisters B. and H. are both engaged to be married, and Diana is writing a book. Poor Diana! We heard the other day that Mr. Padusoy is leaving the Silver Street Chapel. He has married a rich Somersetshire widow, and has got a church there somewhere. I don't think Diana minds it. To-morrow will be my wedding-day; we go to Paris and Brussels.

This is the last entry in the diary, and as we close our peep into the proceedings of this remarkable revolutionary club, we cannot but hope that the same freshness of thought and longing for work (which may sometimes have bordered on the extravagant) may follow its members all the days of their lives. For is it not written, "Laborare est orare," and "Magna est veritas et prevalebit"?



[PAUL CHANTREY'S DAUGHTER.]

SHE paused a moment and gazed furtively around—this Margaret Chantrey, beautiful enough for any king's daughter, with the peculiar something that most people admit to be the prerogative of birth and breeding; an indefinable air and grace, a certain sumptuousness, if the word is not too important to apply to seventeen, blossoming in the tender sunrise of youth.

She, with her elegance, and refinement, and rich attire; her dainty feet, that seemed too airy for the common stone flagging; the maid behind her. What could this bright and fortunate and brilliant girl have to do with that poor young woman on the other side the street?

Margaret saw her; saw the pale, worn face, the eyes that bore traces of weeping, the shabby attire. Should she pass her by?

"No," she said to herself, with passionate eagerness, choking down a great lump in her throat—"Lina was always so good to me. It would be shameful ingratitude."

Then, bidding the maid stay where she was, she flashed across the street, caught the cold fingers from under the coarse shawl, her own warm and rosy from their nest of ermine; and in a strong, sweet voice, cried, "Lina! Lina!"

"Oh!"—with a start of surprise, and a look of consternation out of the heavy blue eyes—"Oh! it is not you, Margaret!"

"Yes it is Margaret. Lina, I have not forgotten those old days when you and your mother were so good to us. I must forget papa before I can forget that."

"But you are—so different now," said Lina du Puy, drawing back in sudden delicacy.

There was certainly a great dissimilarity between them. Margaret Chantrey, in her silk, and velvet, and ermine, and the long white plume trailing from the hat that crowned her curls of gold: everything was, in short, most rare and elegant. The other, in her brown dress and plaid shawl, and shabby black velvet bonnet, with some faded leaves and flowers. As to the two faces: they might have been a study for a painter wanting contrasts.

Possibly Margaret Chantrey had as good blood in her veins as the proudest dame can have. Her father was that brilliant unsuccessful artist, Paul Chantrey, who, in rare moments of boasting, would say that he traced his descent backwards through generations. He was just a Bohemian, as are many other artists: perhaps their want of success makes them so. He did not paint many works. Those few were rare and beautiful: yet the public did not appreciate them until the daisies had blossomed above the grave in which lay

the poor, worn man. Then fine judges said : " Here was, indeed, a genius ! If he had been more persevering, or ambitious, or industrious—anything but idle, and poor, and proud." But Paul Chantrey was not idle ; he painted and sold when he could find buyers. But he never asked a favour of any man. He was too gentle, and sensitive, and delicate to push his way through the turbulent crowd rushing up the hill of success : and then came his lingering illness, and his death.

His wife was a noble and impoverished Italian lady. She went upon the stage for support, having no means and no friends to help her. Mr. Chantrey lost caste when he married her ; though she was lovely as a poet's dream, and inherited the grace and culture of generations of refinement. Her tenderness to him failed to ennoble her in the eyes of strict, pure souls, who never knew cold or starvation, or hunger, or that worst of all agony—the lingering death of loved ones, when a tithe of the gold lavished by us upon a single luxury would have saved them. Being nothing but a stage singer, of course she was quite beneath the notice of well-bred people.

She was brought home one night to Paul, himself then, and long, an invalid, with a face of ghastly whiteness, and a small scarlet stream issuing from the pallid lips. During her exertions that evening, dancing for the sick husband that was at home, and the poor little child, she had broken a blood-vessel. Paul sold the picture in which he had interwoven the love and ambition of his whole life for a mere pittance wherewith to give her decent Christian burial. Some kind, humble friends came to take care of Paul then—Mrs. Chantrey's French friend, Madame du Puy, and her daughter Lina, Bohemians also, for Lina was a dancer on the same stage.

From that time Paul Chantrey never did a stroke of work. He was not able to do it. But he must live. Good Madame du Puy, who had nothing but her daughter's earnings, could not keep him much. It was decided that the little Margaret should go upon the stage, and dance too ; and for twelve months *she* supported her father. Madame du Puy nursed him, for it was a long, lingering illness and death, and Margaret earned the pittance that kept them. The girl went to and fro with Lina, who was some years the elder.

On the very night that was Paul Chantrey's last, one whom he had known well, but had not seen for years, chanced to find him out—Richard Ashburton. He had gone very late to college, and then made nearly the tour of the world ; while unsuccessful Paul was starving and dying.

" You'll save my child, my darling, Dick ? " he said, in the tremulous death weakness. " I know I shall find her mother an angel in heaven, and Margaret has been an angel here."

So Richard Ashburton carried the poor girl home to his mother, who had once loved Paul Chantrey like a son.

Yet it must be confessed that she shrank somewhat from this little

dancing girl, whose mother had been a stage singer. "If Paul had but married wisely!" lamented Mrs. Ashburton.

However, they carried away the girl to their country house, and educated her, and brought her up to wealth and refinement. That was three years ago. Margaret was seventeen now, but older than her years, the result of her early Bohemian life. Just now they had come to town for a month or two's sojourn, and Margaret, chancing to be out alone, met Lina.

Margaret came out of her momentary trance. She was wondering whether anything besides wealth made the difference between herself and dear, noble Lina, whom she had loved with a child's fervour.

"But I'm glad to see you—so glad," with a long, quivering breath. "And you are in trouble—you have been crying! How is—Granny?"

"That is my trouble, Margaret," answered Lina, and the tears flowed afresh. "I've been to beg off, but couldn't. To-night is Mademoiselle Arline's benefit, and they will not give me up. Oh, Margaret, thank God every day of your life that you are not a dancer. We must dance, even if it be on the graves of our kindred."

There was a passionate anguish in the girl's tone. A sob that shook her slight frame.

"Then Granny is ——"

Margaret could not finish her sentence, but looked at her friend with an awe-stricken face. She had always called good old Madame du Puy Granny.

"Granny—my poor mother—is dying," said Lina. "I have been, as I tell you, to get excused to-night, and cannot. It seems that I would give half my own life to stay with her till she dies."

"Do you mean—dying now? To-day?"

"The doctor thinks she will last till evening."

"Oh, Lina, Lina, take me with you. I must see her once again."

The young girl clung to her friend. She was not afraid of her silks, her velvet, and costly ermine being contaminated. For somehow the old life was strong upon her, and these three years of luxury were the dream.

"But Margaret—Miss Margaret, I ought to say—what will they think at home?"

"Nothing; they won't be angry. Mrs. Ashburton may wait for me one moment."

Running across the street to the maid who waited, Miss Chantrey told her to go home, that she was going to see a sick friend, and went back again to Lina.

They hurried along. It was noon—a bleak, dreary March day. Upstairs in a forlorn-looking place, just ready to fall into decay, here, in the garret room, lay Madame du Puy.

"She liked it better because there was no one to make a noise over her head," apologised Lina.

The house had been built by some aristocratic man who had a Dutch taste. Even this upper garret was large. It had two great dormer windows, one of which was filled with vines and flowers—a perfect greenery. The place was scrupulously neat, though the furniture was old and worn. A bright fire burning in the stove, an atmosphere of warmth and faint perfume, and an air of quaintness unusual. Margaret paused in astonishment.

In the bed, under the snow-white cover, lay a wasted, shrunken figure. But Margaret knew it at once, and was kneeling beside the couch a moment later, her great eyes full of tender pity, her own fair face flushed and tearful, and her plump, warm hands clasping those shadows that had nearly lost their hold on life.

"You don't know me, Granny, but I'm little Rita Chantrey. You used to call me Rita, you know. I have never forgotten you, nor how you held poor mamma in your arms all that long night, and how you brought some white roses to put in her coffin."

Granny looked wistfully out of her sunken eyes. "You're a grand lady now, we hear," breathed the dying woman.

"Not so grand that I've forgotten you, or ceased to care for Lina."

A sweet, steadfast smile shone on the face. "Poor Lina! She has so few friends now. None, I think."

How the feeble voice quavered through the words. Rita's heart was full of tenderest sympathy.

"Child!" touching Lina, "you are going to stay with me this one evening? You may stay?"

The slowly-moving eyes questioned so hungrily that the pale girl wavered for a moment. How could she bear to tell her mother the truth.

"I am so glad, so thankful," murmured Madame du Puy. "No, I knew they would not grudge just the last evening to your dying mother. Rita, I am going—to—the far country. Will there be any place for a poor old woman like me?"

"There will," said Margaret, clearly and earnestly.

"I sometimes think—but I never could understand all their doctrines. A parson comes in to pray sometimes, and the prayers are sweet. But looking back on my life, I can see that I have done many wrong things."

"Granny," said Margaret, "you have fed the hungry, and sheltered the homeless. You did not give a cup of cold water only, but the best you had, and sometimes *all* you had. Do you think God will not remember it, and be merciful?"

"Be merciful! That's it. Merciful to me a sinner! Ay, ay. He was so merciful that He sent His Son to die in our stead. Can't you say a little prayer, Rita? Our Father. That was *His* prayer, you know?"

Margaret clasped her hands, and repeated it in a low, faltering, reverential tone.

After that she seemed to doze. Lina and Rita went over to the window and had a talk to themselves, interspersed with many tears.

"She has not suffered for anything," explained Lina. "Only since she got worse, when she feared she might die at any moment. This going away of mine twice a day has been dreadful. Once or twice I have got off the rehearsal, but I couldn't get off the other. It breaks my heart to leave her alone to-night."

Lina broke down, sobbing convulsively.

"And they would not ——"

"No, it spoils the piece. I am a good dancer, you know, and have to take a chief part. But, oh! to think that while I am dancing she may be dying. Not to hear her last word; not to kiss the poor lips as the last breath flutters out of them!"

"Let me think," said Margaret.

She looked steadily over to the grey sky for many moments. Sometimes her face flushed, sometimes it was almost as pale as Granny's in yonder bed. It seemed to her one of the wrongest and saddest and cruellest things that Lina should have to leave her dying mother at the closing hour.

"Is there *no one* at the theatre who can take your place for one single night, Lina?"

"No one. At least, they say there's not, so it comes to the same. It is but an old dance, either—one you must remember, Rita."

"Describe it to me," said Margaret. "Your part especially."

Lina, suspecting not the drift of the question, described her part minutely. After listening for a few minutes, the recollection of it came back to Margaret: she remembered it well.

"I could take it," she said to herself.

Presently she went away, promising to return soon, but there was a strange look in her large, purple-grey eyes, and a peculiar expression hovering about her mouth. Calling a cab, she told the man to drive quickly, and was soon deposited at the elegant mansion that was the present abode of the Ashburtons, who had cared for her since the night of Paul Chantrey's death. They grudged her nothing, these Ashburtons: education, accomplishments, luxury; and only demanded that she should forget the old life utterly in return. They spoke of her father's genius and misfortunes; but they never made the smallest mention of her mother. If by ill-luck Margaret spoke of her, she was met by a frown. Yet these three years had been very happy ones to Margaret Chantrey. They could not sigh over any lack of grace or refinement, or want of beauty: all that was returned to them. At times it really appeared as if Richard Ashburton took a warm and tender interest in her, but he never expressed it. There were times when poor Margaret felt like a waif stranded on some distant shore steeped in exquisite beauty; when one clinging, blossoming vine would have been more to her than all these stately halls.

It chanced on this day that Margaret was alone. Mrs. Ashburton

had gone to her sister's in the country, and Miss Marsh, the governess, had had a telegram in the morning to say her father was ill. Where Richard was Margaret did not know.

"Do any of you know whether Mr. Ashburton will be in soon?" she asked of one of the maids, Wilson.

None of them knew. Dinner was being prepared as usual: it was supposed he would be in then.

Taking something to eat, Margaret changed her attire for plainer things. Then she called Wilson.

"I am going to spend the rest of the day with a friend," she said. "Perhaps I shall stay all night."

"Oh, Miss Margaret! and not even Miss Marsh here to ask! I am afraid Mrs. Ashburton would not like it."

Margaret had thought of this also. Perhaps her remaining out all night might offend Mrs. Ashburton. But then—it might be so late.

"Well, I will come at all events then, Wilson."

"But where is it that you are going, Miss Margaret? The carriage had better fetch you."

"No, no. I shall come home all safe without the carriage. Good-bye, Wilson."

"I'm not quite sure that it is right," thought Wilson. "I wish I had asked her more. Yet the child would not do anything wrong."

She bought some jellies and luxuries, and made her way back in a cab to the dilapidated old house. Lina brightened at her coming, but Granny had changed strangely in these few hours. Now and then she muttered some wandering words, or smiled faintly in Lina's face. And so the night dropped down upon them.

Lina looked grey, and wan, and pinched, not much like the lovely mermaid she was to represent later in the evening.

"Oh! I can't go," she said, with a cry of despair and pain. "And they will keep back my week's pay, and perhaps give my place to another!"

"Lina!" Margaret took the tearful face in her hands. "Lina, I have been resolving all the afternoon that you shall not go."

Lina questioned her with frightened eyes.

"You shall dress me, and let me go instead."

"What?" exclaimed the wondering Lina.

"Yes. I can take it. I can do the necessary dancing. I remember the part as though I had seen it yesterday. I can, and I will take it. I shall enjoy it, too. It seems to me that the one passion of my life is dancing. You shall stay here and watch; I know all about it, and will not be alarmed at anything. I have ordered a carriage to come for me, and it will bring me back safely."

"Oh, Margaret, I cannot allow you to do this; indeed I cannot. I will give it all up first, theatre and all."

"Yes, you can. I am almost wild for a taste of the old life, just a glimpse of the light and glamour, and the long beats of

the inspiring music. Why, it would be delicious—for this once only."

"But your friends the Ashburtons?"

Margaret was silent for a moment. "They may be angry, perhaps, just at first; only that. Where's the harm, Lina? Mrs. Ashburton and all the people we know go to see this dancing: if it be right for them to look on, will it be wrong for me to dance?"

"My head aches," said Lina wearily. "When I begin to think of the right and wrong, I get confused. Some of the grand ladies do things that we poor girls shrink from, and yet they fancy that we ——"

"Hush, dear. Let me bathe your poor throbbing temples. No one expects me home until late, so do not give it a thought. *I am going to dance for you to-night.*"

Margaret overruled thus all active scruples. She had such a pretty, imperious way; and to-night, in her glowing health and energy, she was stronger to conquer than poor grief-worn Lina.

She curled her golden hair in wavy ringlets, until it looked like a shimmering sea. Her eyes were luminous lakes, and her cheek blossomed like the heart of a rose. Some strange enchantment inspired her. She was going to have one taste of the old life.

Then she dressed herself suitably in Lina's things: they were both so much of a size as to give no difficulty on that score: and put her own plain dress over all. The carriage ordered drew up in the street below. Margaret bent to kiss poor Granny's cold, wrinkled face and passive lips.

"Don't leave me, Lina," the faint voice murmured: and it made Margaret strong.

"Good-bye, Lina," she said, with a kiss. "I will do everything just as you have directed."

She was late at the theatre. They were scolding about Lina, and she hurried into the dressing-room. The attendant there was a stranger. It was curious that it should have happened so: but the regular woman was ill, and for to-night a substitute was provided. She did not know but it was the regular dancer, Lina du Puy, whom she had to dress. The other girls were ready and had quitted the room, and the woman was a trifle cross at the tardiness of the (amongst them) chief dancer. So, amid much hurry, Margaret slipped into her cloudy, airy, diaphanous garments, and ran across to the stage, questioning her own identity.

The audience waited: Margaret was indeed late. This creature, Lurline, rising from the sea foam with the cloud of golden lights about her, was more beautiful than ever before. The surging tide of music throbbed on the air, and it touched some wandering chord in Margaret's nature. Every pulse started into passionate life. The light feet were at home in those graceful poises and whirls, and in that slow,

floating, undulating movement, in which the very soul seemed to grow languid with overwhelming grace.

Up and down. Circles widening, narrowing; drooping arms, and shoulders, and eyes; soft lights in rose and violet, gold and purple; a glamour of beauty, a perpetual dazzle, until at last the Naiad disappeared in her sea-green foam.

Then came a prolonged burst of applause. Lina had never danced like this: had never *looked* the character as Margaret looked it. An eager childish delight seemed to thrill her every nerve.

"You are perfectly marvellous to-night!" declared Mademoiselle Arline, who rarely condescended to speak to the ordinary dancers.

"You—— Why—are you a witch, child? It is not Lina du Puy!"

"No, it is not Lina. Her grandmother is dying, and I came to take her place."

"Who are you?"

"Call me Lina. For I *am* Lina to-night."

Something in the young girl checked further inquiries. And mademoiselle was in no wise offended, since the dancing had been so vast a success, and it was her own benefit. At Easter she was going abroad to fulfil other engagements.

The piece went on. Now the audience saw a whirling, radiating circle, a haunting crowd of lovely forms and faces; then only this one peerless girl, holding them breathless. It seemed to Margaret that she could dance on these enchanted boards for ever.

At last the concluding act came. There was some wonderful dancing, some bewildering fairy scenery: and Margaret, on a cloud, with her own cloud of filmy golden hair about her, might have been the Peri indeed.

She hardly listened for thanks and compliments, but hurried off her stage trappings, and hurried on her mortal garments with a sensation akin to intoxication. The hired carriage awaited her, and she sprang in, leaving hosts of questions unanswered.

Arrived at Madame du Puy's, she hastened up the stairs, hardly daring to enter. Lina met her on the threshold.

"I am safe, you see. It was—royal! Why should I not tell the truth? I am not tired, but full of excitement, and throbbing with a lingering sense of music. It was triumph. And your poor mother, Lina?"

Lina shook her head. Margaret gathered the truth from the room's strange stillness.

"Yes, she is gone," sobbed Lina. "She rallied again after you left, and talked, oh! so sweetly. Margaret, is there a heaven for us poor folks who do the best we can in our hard, thorny path? For *she* was so good in her simple, homely way. And I can never, never thank you. Not for worlds would I have missed this evening with her."

Margaret was weeping too. Changing her things again, she

kissed Lina in silence, and ran downstairs, the great sobs in her throat almost choking her. Oh! how strange life was. Sorrow, and death, and gaiety, and carelessness, jostled each other on every side. If she could dare to tell all this to Richard Ashburton, surely he would give her pardon!

The carriage deposited her at home. She shivered a little in the hall. Reaction had set in; all her excitement was gone: how weak and tired she was no one but herself could know.

Richard Ashburton opened the drawing-room door. Pale and stern, his lips compressed to a scarlet line, his eyes steady with a relentless light, he stood.

"Oh!" she exclaimed with a crimson flush, which quickly faded to ashes.

She would have glided by him, but he barred her with his arm, and led her into the dimly lighted-room.

"Where have you been, Margaret?" he asked: and his voice was steely and incisive, like the axe of an executioner.

"Don't ask me to-night," she pleaded in pitiful bewilderment, shrinking at every nerve.

"I did not expect you to answer. Unfortunately, I know—or fear I know. Chance took me to the old theatre to-night: and I thought I saw you amidst the dancers. I could scarcely be mistaken in that face, in that shining hair. Were you there, or not?"

He hoped she would give him an indignant denial. He would believe her against the evidence of his own senses. But Margaret Chantrey would have cut off her right hand sooner than utter an untruth.

"I was there."

A sharp pang, as of a knife's point, pierced Richard Ashburton's heart. Worse than all, he thought she stood there before him bold and defiant. Ah! how our best friends misjudge us because a tear sometimes comes too late. It seemed to Margaret that she should fall on the floor at his very feet; the room swam round to her tired and excited brain. Bitter anger was aroused within him, bitter scorn lay in his tone.

"So," he said, "the old life that we have striven to lead you to forget has a stronger hold upon you than gratitude. It is as my mother predicted."

There are moments in the lives of some women when a sudden revelation lifts them up to a heaven of perfect love and trust. It plunged Margaret into a gulf of black despair. Child as they had always considered her, she knew now that she loved Richard Ashburton with a woman's enduring passion. But his tone, his stern face, misled her. What was she to him? Nothing. Just the contemptible little waif they had saved, and nothing higher or better. Yes! she might (as she believed) as well lay her soul bare to the crowd, before whom she had danced to-night,

as to this man. He and his mother had deemed her a toy, pretty enough to be played with ; but far beneath them in all the finest relations of life. And she loved him ! She knew it now—she loved him ; and he despised her as a thing of scorn. Poor Margaret Chantrey's heart seemed breaking then.

"You know you were to give up all old associates, to blot out that past life and forget it," he resumed in his coldest tone—for indeed this escapade was trying him sorely. "Margaret, it pains me to say it, but there has been a course of duplicity persevered in that one would hardly credit in a mere child. For this plan must have been in your mind for months, and you must have been waiting for an opportunity to put it into execution. It is not possible that you should dance as you danced to-night without long and constant practice. What can you say to my mother ? Is this a fitting reward for her kindness ?"

He had already judged and condemned her : and, false though his assumptions were, she could not defend herself. She clasped her small white hands together, and there was a curious flickering of the lines about the mouth. One wild impulse crossed her soul : to fling herself at his feet and plead for a little tenderness. Could she dare to do it ?

Hesitating, she raised her eyes. How cold and pitiless he looked ; how sternly condemning. No, though she fell on her knees, a penitent, and told the truth, he would not believe her : she could see that. And there rushed over herself a most condemning, exaggerated view of the step she had taken : she saw how false it had been, how impossible that it could ever be recalled. All the intoxication, the triumph, the glamour, and the glitter looked most unreal to her now.

"Let me go !" she exclaimed, with a cry of anguish. "You are cruel !"

"Cruel ! What have I done ? Have we not both tried to lead you to forget the poverty, and toil, and evil of the past ? Have we not cared for you tenderly, surrounded you with luxury ?—yet the old life is stronger than it all. But you will have to choose between us ; to renounce one or the other."

She flew past him like a wild, hunted thing, up the broad stairs to her own room, and locked the door. He doubted her. He believed she could be base, and vile, and full of black deceit ! He might forgive, but he could never, never love her. What mad folly in her to think *that* could ever have been ! Mrs. Ashburton wanted him to marry his cousin—that rich girl who was there so constantly. She had fancied that he did not care for that girl ; but she must have been mistaken. And to stay here, to see another worshipped with all the trust and confidence of his soul—to stay and be nothing to him ; worse than nothing : no, she could not bear that. Better that she should go back to the old life.

So reasoned this inexperienced but impassioned girl. And in her foolishness, her desolation, she took a fatal step.

Richard Ashburton sat a long while over his late breakfast the following morning, and yet Margaret came not. Mrs. Ashburton, who had come home very late indeed, and felt weary, had not yet risen. He paced the library in tumult and impatience, waiting for Margaret: she, he supposed, was weary too: and he wanted her to come, that he might tell her how harsh he had been the past night. At mid-day Wilson entered her room. No Margaret was there. On the table lay a brief note, addressed to him.

"I have gone back to the old life."

"I always felt a little afraid," confessed Mrs. Ashburton in her smooth and stately tone. "There was a taint of it in her blood, an alien, gipsy element. Poor Paul! What a pity he should have wrecked himself by marrying that Italian singer!"

Three years had come and gone since Margaret Chantrey left her home of luxury and beauty. They had not found her. Left it for what? Richard Ashburton often asked himself the question. He had been cold and stern to her that night; pitiless, indeed, for his disappointment in her had proved so deep and bitter. But he knew now that the light in her courageous face, which he had termed hardness and duplicity, must have sprung from truth and honour. Foolish, daring, and Quixotic as the step she had taken that night, in dancing, had been, he wished with his whole repentant heart that he had met it differently.

He had been grave before, but now a shadow seemed to hang about him. His mother, with a woman's intuition, guessed that Margaret had been more to him than a bright, winsome child.

"Yet it is best they should be separated," she told herself; but told it with a sigh, for there was some pity in her nature as well as pride. Richard could not be made to understand the wrong it would be to his children to give them such a mother.

In this, the third year, Richard Ashburton went on the Continent, and made there a long sojourn; now halting in this place, now in that. In the last place he stopped at, a little obscure Italian town, fever had broken out, and he took it. The inhabitants had, so many as could, run away in fright, leaving neither women nor nurses for the sick.

Mr. Ashburton had it badly. For a week or two he was quite out of his senses. But his strong constitution had finally conquered the disease, and the balmy April sunshine was doing the rest.

"I owe my life to you, Doctor Biagi," he said thankfully one morning. "My mother will not know how to thank you."

The little, swarthy Italian doctor rubbed his hands together.

"It was a hard fight, signor, but the credit is not all mine.—Yet the signora bade me never mention it."

"The signora!" exclaimed Richard, with a puzzled expression.

"The women had all run away, you know, signor, and we could get no nurses. It might have gone badly with you, but that a beautiful English lady heard of your case, and came to nurse you herself. She never left you until the danger was past, and you were recovering consciousness. You owe your life to her more than to me."

"Who was this English lady?"

"I forget her name just now. Those English names are puzzling to us Italians. She speaks our language as a native, though, and she is so beautiful: an angel's face with bright golden hair."

A strange idea brought a thrill to Richard Ashburton's weakened frame. Speaking Italian as a native—and with beautiful golden hair!

"Was she young, doctor?"

"Quite young."

"Do you think the name was Chantrey?"

"Shan-tree? But yes, it is like that. I did not want her to stay here: she had not the health for it: but she quietly told me she must and should."

"What is the matter with her?" asked Richard quickly.

"The malady that some of you English have," answered the doctor, tapping his chest. "And now she has taken the fever through nursing you. But she has it slightly."

"Taken the fever from me! Good heavens!" added Richard, falling back on his sofa cushions.

"She saved your life," said the little doctor, in his straightforward manner. "And though the fever has not been severe, she has little strength. If you would like to send a message——"

Ashburton feared he knew what that meant.

"Yes," he answered, with a strange hush in his tone, "I would like to send a message. When are you going? Is it far?"

"Half a league, perhaps. I shall go out again at four."

"Call as you pass," was the brief response.

Dr. Biagi was not wrong when he fancied that Mr. Ashburton intended to go himself. He made no objection after examining his pulse.

A little vine-embowered cottage with a sturdy peasant woman for mistress. Within, the slender form of a watcher, who came forward with an anxious face. It was Lina du Puy.

The explanation of the past may be given in a few brief words.

On the very day following the death of Madame du Puy, Lina received the offer of an engagement in Paris, for which her mother had long hoped. She went to it immediately, taking Margaret with her: and hence the secret of Mr. Ashburton's non-successful inquiries after her. The engagement in Paris at an end, they came on to Italy. Both of them had been most successful in their career since; both had led the most retired and the best of lives. Then Margaret's health began to fail. Symptoms of consumption mani-

fested themselves. Lina remembered the death of Mrs. Chantrey, and shuddered for her friend. Giving up their engagements for a season, they came to this retired town, to see what rest and quiet would do for Margaret. But it did nothing—she grew worse and weaker. Then the fever broke out. They thought they were safe, being so far from the town. And safe they would have been, but that Dr. Biagi told them of his English patient, one Signor Richard Ashburton; and Margaret insisted upon going to nurse him. All this Lina hurriedly told, together with the true history of that long-past night. Margaret had gone to dance in her place that she might stay with her dying mother.

"Let me go in to her," he gasped.

Lina stood aside. Richard Ashburton entered the chamber of death; and there lay Margaret, white and wasted, but with more than mortal beauty.

"Oh, my child! my darling!"

Margaret moved her eyes slowly, and then uttered a low, passionate cry.

He took her in his arms; he kissed the pale, trembling lips and downcast eyelids, still radiant with their beautiful fringe.

"My little wanderer," he said, "my precious darling! you can never know my grief at finding you thus, too late. Oh! why did you leave me? I was cruel that night, unjust; but you need not have been ashamed of the truth. Lina has told me. It was noble, if ill-judged. And if you could understand my soul at this moment, and believe that the old dream of those days has never utterly faded ——" He broke down with emotion.

"A dream?" she murmured.

"The dream that I should win you for my wife. The *hope* that I should. Margaret, I loved you dearly."

She raised her white, wan face, into which there came something of a glorifying flush, and lay in his arms, softly whispering:

"It was best then that I should go, Richard. Best for your mother's sake; for all our sakes. Let me tell the truth now—death always gives us courage, you know. Some fascination of the old life lured me, and my love for Lina and Madame du Puy was strong. They once stood between my father and starvation; they tended my mother: and Lina has repaid what I did that night with the tenderest care: but for her you might never have looked upon the face of your poor little Margaret now. Yes, I went that night to dance in her stead, and fate sent you there."

"Oh, if you had told me all!" he groaned.

"You doubted me—before I had even spoken! Yes, you did, Richard. I thought you were implacably angry, thought you scorned and despised me; while I—God will forgive it now—loved you with a child's unreasoning, jealous adoration. To be thrust aside because I was not your equal, to be held as pet and plaything, but never

aspire to the height of friend—to see, perhaps, another loved and revered—ah! it was a child's foolish folly."

"I loved you then, Margaret; loved you truly, tenderly, passionately. I shall never love another."

She made an entreating gesture with her wasted hands. How bitter all this past misapprehension was!

"I was not worthy of so much love, Richard," she softly whispered. "Perhaps I never should have been. But"—raising the sad, purple eyes, full of their dying lights—"I want you to know that poor dancers may be good and pure, in spite of their shortened skirts and the tinsel they must wear. I and Lina have tried to do our duty before God as truly as we could have done it had we had parents to protect us, handsome homes to shelter us. I am going to Him with, so far, a clear conscience."

"And you came to save me; you have given your life for mine! Oh, Margaret! is it too late? Can no love, and no repentance bring you back? Ah, heaven! this is bitter."

"It is best, Richard: dear Richard, believe me it is best," she answered; but her voice began to waver strangely, and the dusk of twilight floated before her dreamy eyes. "I thank you for some happy years. I was glad to do it—at the last. Your life is grander and broader than my poor, pale years, gone astray among thorns. Ask God to forgive me all—for your sake."

He gathered her into his arms, and the warm tears of passionate regret dropped upon her pure face, slowly turning to sculptured marble. One tender, fluttering kiss, and the old life and the new life were alike ended.

Margaret Chantrey was laid in her quiet grave: which Lina du Puy will often turn aside out of her way to tend.

Whether this bright, impulsive, but grand and tender soul was wasted we cannot decide here. Was it better that she should be taken to her rest thus early, or that she should have stayed decorously at Mrs. Ashburton's, and lived to be Richard's wife? Who can tell? God knows best.

Mrs. Ashburton frets a little amid her state and elegance that Richard does not marry. She has well-nigh forgotten the laughing, wayward girl who once made the house bright.

He will never forget. Is it so strange a thing to be true to the woman a man has loved, and who gave her sweet young life for his? Is it not a little fragment of the greater love, left amid the ruins of this grey old world?

A. M. D.

LITTLE THINGS.

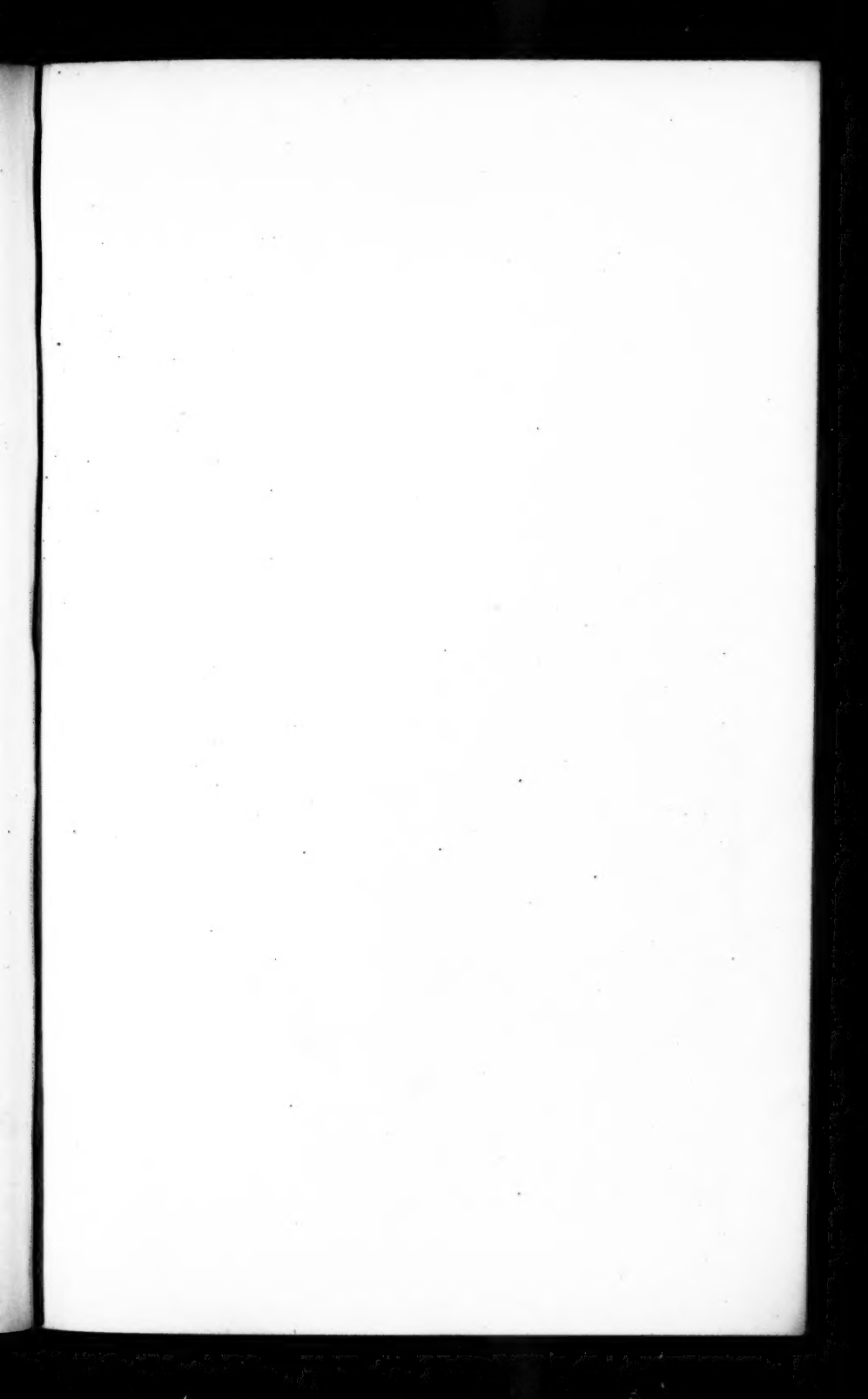
A meeting after twenty years !
 I'm forty, and a colonel.
 We parted full of hopes and fears,
 When both our lives were vernal.
 You calmly eat your *fricandeau*,
 My heart gives ne'er a flutter,
 The while I think how, years ago,
 I cut you bread and butter.

I've lived so long in Eastern climes
 No doubt I'm dull and silly ;
 We did not often see the *Times*,
 To read of Piccadilly.
 This direful war 'twixt Russ and Turk,
 You laugh and call it " horrid ! "
 But think a sadder piece of work
 That mole upon your forehead.

We touch on Music, Drama, Art,
 For one and all you're ready ;
 You used to sing some songs by heart
 When we were Nell and Teddy.
 To watch you draw, to hear you play,
 I've often shirked my Latin ;
 You say you sat to Daubs, R.A.,
 Who paints such lovely satin !

I have some little things laid by :
 Great things we thought them, surely ?
 A sketch you made, all trees and sky,
 A rose you gave demurely.
 Oh, Vicat Cole ! That Surrey view
 I held a priceless treasure—
 Nor all the roses grown at Kew
 Could yield *that* rose's pleasure.

Our hostess bows, you sail away
 With soft frou-frou and rustle ;
 Well, well, one changes every day
 In Life's relentless bustle !
 And to forget we've met again
 Shall be my first endeavour,
 That in my mind you may remain
 A little thing for ever.—G. B. STUART.





SWAIN & S.

M. ELLER EDWARDS.

MISS MARY.

J. SWAIN.